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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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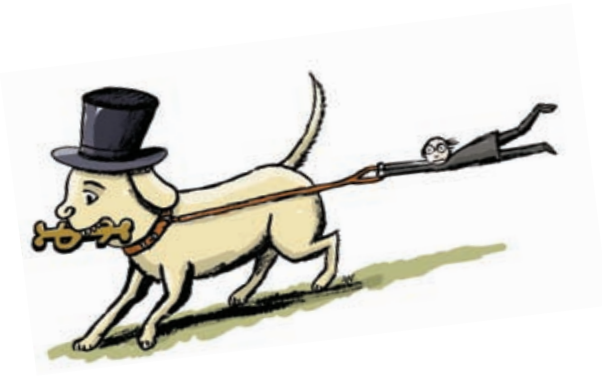
Czar Crossed

PITY THE PAY CZAR. When Ken Feinberg announced last month that he would slash pay at seven firms that received federal bailout funds and convert large chunks of compensation to stock units that can't be sold for years, he was met with almost universal opprobrium. Critics of Wall Street protested that simply paying out salaries in stock rather than cash would have little effect on executives at the bailed-out firms, to say nothing of the banking culture at large. "This is a ploy to appease a public enraged by Wall Street bonuses, particularly Goldman's which is notably unaffected by the move," finance blogger Yves Smith wrote in *The New York Times*. Meanwhile, bankers complained that the scheme would hamper the ability of those firms to compete for the best talent in the business. "It looks like meatball surgery with a sledgehammer," one independent compensation expert told the paper. "There are going to be some people who just pick up their sticks and go." Even the administration seemed lukewarm about Feinberg's compromise. *The Wall Street Journal* reported that the White House deliberately made him unaccountable to Treasury so that it wouldn't have to deal with the predictable fallout.



Fortunately, we get to start replaying the whole tortured drama in a few short weeks. Because Feinberg's agreements only apply to 2009 salaries, he still has to negotiate next year's compensation packages for all seven major bank-bailout recipients—AIG, Bank of America, Citigroup, GM, GMAC, Chrysler, and Chrysler Financial—set to take effect in January. Which is why, as we approach the next round—sure to launch its own separate uproar—it's worth keeping in mind that the pay czar is largely beside the point.

That's not to say bankers are underpaid. Far from it. Financial-industry bonuses are expected to rise 40 percent this year. Goldman Sachs, just months after paying back taxpayer dollars, is expected to give out bonuses that exceed what the company paid out in 2007, at the height of the bubble. Even after Feinberg's pay cuts, 66 executives at the seven companies under his jurisdiction will receive at least $1 million in long-term compensation.

The point, rather, is that there's very little that a czar—even one as apparently well-intentioned and tough-minded as Feinberg—can accomplish in this realm. Compensation reflects a number of factors: a firm's profitability, size, business model, competitors, etc. When a firm is making billions in profits and has all sorts of unregulated competitors (like hedge funds or foreign banks) who are equally profitable and can afford to pay multimillion-dollar salaries, it's very difficult to force its executives to take an 80 or 90 percent pay cut. More likely, such a decree will be counterproductive, causing the targeted executives to leave for unregulated competitors, and therefore undermining the government's efforts to recoup its investments in these firms.

Really changing executive pay at big commercial banks would require reforming the structure of the banking industry. That would start with the kind of proposal former Fed Chairman Paul Volcker has put forth, which would separate traditional commercial banking (and some investment-banking functions) from proprietary trading—in other words, separating the banking parts of the business from the hedge-fund parts of the business. The current problem is that the hedge-fund parts of the business create huge profits, in turn driving huge salaries, while the banking parts of the business give the firm access to cheap borrowing from the Fed in a crisis, federal deposit insurance, and FDIC backing for its debt issuance. The fact that the two parts are combined also makes the government more likely to bail out a large institution if it verges on collapse.

Let's not kid ourselves. Hedge funds and outlandish financial-sector salaries are probably here to stay. But there's no reason that they should benefit from government support. Spinning off the hedge-fund activities of a company like Citigroup from the more traditional bank activities would drive down salaries in the parts of the business that benefit from enormous government largesse. And if the government did have to step in and save a bank, at least taxpayers wouldn't have to pay salaries that were quite as titanic.

Unfortunately, that's not something a pay czar can accomplish with limited powers over a few bailed-out firms. It would require tough legislation, which means a massive fight in Congress and an investment of presidential capital. The administration opposes Volcker-esque proposals for breaking up the banks, suggesting that truly reforming executive compensation is not a top priority. That's disappointing but understandable—there's a lot on Wall Street that needs reforming. But, as long as that's the case, don't blame Ken Feinberg for failing to lower executive pay. There isn't much he can do. ◆

ROBERT NEUBECKER

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Islam: Religion of Peace?

Does Islam differ from Judaism and Christianity in endorsing violence? The summer *Middle East Quarterly* features an analysis by Raymond Ibrahim that argues it does. Whereas the Jewish scriptures contain no open-ended commandments to murder Gentiles and the New Testament contains not one verse advocating violence, the Koran incites Muslims universally to attack, kill, and plunder nonbelievers. Modern Muslim violence, Ibrahim concludes, issues directly from its holy book.

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Popularity Contest

Has Obama gone too far?

JONATHAN CHAIT

On the inside cover of the last issue of The New Republic, the conservative American Future Fund (AFF) took out an advertisement helpfully warning moderate Democrats to abandon health care reform. The ad features head shots of numerous Democratic members of Congress who lost their seats in 1994. The headline reads, "The Losers of 1994 ... Thanks to Health Care!"

I hesitate to impugn the intellectual integrity of any of the good folks who purchase space in this magazine in order to share their concerns about public policy. Yet I cannot help but wonder if AFF has truly proffered this advice in good faith. The ad calls health care reform a "Majority Killer." Yet Democrats did not lose their seats in 1994 because they enacted health care reform. They failed to enact, or even vote on, health care reform. So it's hard to see why this historical example recommends letting health care reform die an ignominious death as an attractive strategy for the majority party.

The political landscape looks worse for the Democrats than it did a year ago. Why has that happened? Republicans are expending a great deal of energy trying to convince Democrats that it's because the Obama administration has overreached. Senator Lamar Alexander helpfully warns that Obama's "policies, and those pushed by the congressional Democrats, are scaring the daylights out of people."

The most direct and immediate goal of this campaign is to spook moderate Democrats into abandoning health care reform. It is true that some of Obama's spending programs—the stimulus and the bailouts of the auto and financial sectors—have little public support. But health care reform actually remains quite popular. Many people think the right has won the health care debate, since polls show that narrow but stable majorities of Americans disapprove of Obama's health care plan. The problem with this gauge is that it lumps together Obama's critics from the right with those from the left.

For instance, one recent poll asks whether the Democratic plans create too much government involvement, the right amount, or not enough. Too much gets 42 percent, the right amount 34 percent, and not enough 21 percent. Another question shows that only 28 percent of Americans think the bill goes too far in expanding coverage to the uninsured, 33 percent say it expands coverage the right amount, and 35 percent say it *does not go far enough*. In both cases, majorities of the public either support Obama's approach or wish it went further.

Moreover, a clear majority of Americans say that they want the Democrats to pass a health care bill with a public option, even if this means it would get no GOP votes—a striking result, given the misty-eyed sentiment Americans generally display toward bipartisanship in all its forms.

All of these results suggest that the Democrats' biggest obstacle on health care reform is not a fundamental lack of public agreement but public weariness with the endless legislative grind. Vulnerable congressional Democrats may have *individual* interests in establishing their moderate bona fides by challenging their party leadership. But they have a far stronger *collective* interest in passing a bill.

The second, broader Republican goal is to essentially delegitimize Obama's presidency. This argument, building ever since Obama took office, reached a crescendo in the wake of the Virginia and New Jersey gubernatorial elections. Americans never supported Obama's agenda, say conservatives; and now, thanks to his attempt to impose it, we are seeing the inevitable backlash.

"If the president—opposed by a majority of Americans, with almost no support from the other party—imposes an ideologically divisive health reform, it will smack of radicalism, reinforce polarization and may cede the ideological center to Republicans for years to come," cries former Bush speechwriter Michael Gerson. Democrats "know this legislation is ... possible only because of temporary liberal majorities," complains a *Wall Street Journal* editorial.

How, you might ask, does this differ from George W. Bush ramming through unpopular regressive tax cuts? Well, those were temporary *conservative* majorities. The other difference, of course, is that Obama out-polled his opponent by eight-and-a-half million votes, a margin that exceeded Bush's 2000 popular-vote edge by, oh, roughly nine million votes.

Shouldn't Obama's actual election count for more than two low-turnout gubernatorial races? Oh no. The off-year elections prove Obama's presidency is a fluke. Here is Fox News all-star panelist and *Washington Post* columnist Charles Krauthammer:

> 2008 was a historical anomaly. A uniquely charismatic candidate was running at a time of deep war weariness, with an intensely unpopular Republican president, against a politically incompetent opponent, amid the greatest financial collapse since the Great Depression.

Did factors other than Obama's platform (his charisma, eight years of declining median income, Sarah Palin) help him win? No doubt. This happens every election. Krauthammer gloats of the 2009 elections, "The return to the norm is happening now." Got that? The *normal* state of affairs is an odd-year, low-turnout election occurring in just two states, which have voted against the incumbent party for the past 20 years, with no national candidates on the ballot, and with double-digit unemployment. That's a perfectly calibrated measure of public preference on national issues. But Obama's election was an accident.

Sure, Obama has lost popularity since his inauguration. In a worldwide recession, voters have thrown out incumbent parties of all stripes. And Democrats will probably take a beating next year.

But, if Americans were recoiling at Obama's liberalism, rather than lashing out at the poor economy, you'd expect to see the Democratic Party losing favor and the GOP regaining it. In fact, the opposite remains true. (A recent poll had the Dems' favorable rating at 53-41, and the Republicans' at 36-54.) Given the circumstances, the striking fact about the political landscape is how *little* has changed since November 2008.

Democrats' failure to realize that the public never really supported their agenda, argues Krauthammer, "is the fundamental cause of the Democratic debacle of 2009." But 2009 isn't a debacle, and it won't be unless Democrats get bluffed into making it one. ◆

TRB
From Washington

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The Mall

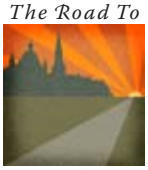
Global Warring

Don't militarize the climate debate.

For years, advocates of climate-change legislation have struggled to find a sales pitch that will sway even the most hardened of skeptics. Polar bears, green jobs, urgent pleas to think of the grandkids … none of them have quite done the trick. But recently, a new argument has come to the fore: the national security case for cutting carbon emissions. At a hearing in October, Senate Democrats invited military leaders and strategists to speak about both the dangers of America's oil dependency and the potential for rising temperatures to create new security threats around the globe. Dennis McGinn, a retired Navy vice admiral, conjured up a not-too-distant future in which increased drought, flooding, and crop failures ravaged areas like sub-Saharan Africa or Bangladesh, fueling violent conflict. Meanwhile, he said, the U.S. military could find itself handcuffed by its over-reliance on oil if prices start spiking. "Continuing the United States' pattern of energy usage in a business-as-usual manner," McGinn warned, "creates an unacceptably high threat level."

It's a claim that resonates far and wide. In August, a poll by the American Security Project reported that most Americans agreed that global warming could "destabilize developing countries, creating the conditions for war and a breeding ground for terrorism." A recent survey in Arkansas—hardly a hotbed of green sentiment—found that, when the security case was placed alongside the conservative mantra that capping carbon amounts to a giant tax, people favored cutting emissions 55 percent to 37 percent. The argument has even wooed conservatives who wouldn't be caught dead at an Earth Day rally. Republican Lindsey Graham recently explained his interest in climate legislation by arguing that global warming could "make the world even a much more dangerous place. It's not just me saying it. A bunch of generals are saying it." The message is so effective that Democrats are counting on it to frame the climate debate: John Kerry, who has been working the security angle in private conversations with swing senators, was made lead sponsor of the Senate cap-and-trade bill for just this reason.

The Road To



Copenhagen

But even if climate-bill backers have finally found the potent argument they've been searching for, that still leaves the substantive issue: To what extent *is* global warming a national security concern for the United States? Right now, the Pentagon, the Armed Forces, and other security experts are trying to figure out just what dire consequences a warming planet might bring. And, as it turns out, the answers are more complex than the simple sales pitch might suggest.

The security argument comes in a variety of strains, but perhaps the one most commonly invoked has little to do with climate change per se—it involves oil. Military commanders in Iraq and Afghanistan, for instance, have become increasingly alarmed about their reliance on crude, not least because fuel convoys are ripe targets for attacks. "All the military departments are looking very specifically at how they take advantage of energy efficiency and lighten the burden of what our troops need to take to the front," says Sherri Goodman, the former deputy under secretary of defense for environmental security during the Clinton administration. Then there's the interrelated claim that America's gas-guzzling ways help bankroll extremism in the Middle East. While this is a powerful reason to use less oil, it also only goes partway in making the case for tackling global warming—which, after all, requires an array of additional steps like zeroing out carbon emissions from coal plants and halting deforestation.

The more compelling climate-specific fear is the possibility that severe global-warming impacts could provoke conflicts around the world. In Sudan, there's already evidence that warmer ocean temperatures have wreaked havoc on rainfall patterns, creating drought that pushed farmers in Darfur into competition for arable land with Arab pastoralists, with bloody results. That wasn't the primary cause of the genocide there—the Khartoum government deserves the vast share of blame—but it's an example of how ecological changes can tip tense situations over the brink. And climate science offers ample warning that similar disruptions could unfold across the globe. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on

CSA PLASTOCK

J. Heroun

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Climate Change, a global temperature rise of two degrees Celsius or more (which is precisely what climate campaigners are hoping to avert) would likely lead to more frequent droughts and crop failures across Africa, Asia, and Latin America; batter coastal regions with flooding and stronger storm surges; and aid the spread of infectious diseases. Glaciers in the Himalayas are expected to melt rapidly in the coming decades, shriveling up a key water source that Pakistan relies on for most of its crops, possibly setting the stage for conflict over rivers in Kashmir. And military experts have warned that greater resource scarcity could cause fragile governments to topple, pointing to events like the food shortages that helped lead to the fall of governments in Ethiopia and Niger in the 1970s. As a 2007 CNA report by a panel of retired military leaders describes, such failed states are ripe for terrorist havens and can succumb to the sort of anarchic violence that leads to calls for U.S. military intervention, as occurred in Somalia in the 1990s.

These dystopian forecasts can sometimes get oversold—as they did in the '90s, when Robert Kaplan's influential *Atlantic Monthly* article, "The Coming Anarchy," roiled Washington with its sensationalist vision of one African country after another disintegrating under the stress of dwindling water supplies and eroding cropland. In the years that followed Kaplan's piece, many academics began poking holes in his thesis, pointing out that just as many, if not more, countries prove surprisingly resilient in the face of grave environmental stresses. And, as with Darfur, resources are only one risk factor; people themselves still have to decide to go to war. "You don't want to frame it as a deterministic thing, that it's all going to hell in a hand-basket," says Geoff Dabelko, who directs the Environmental Change and Security Program at the Wilson Center. Still, Dabelko says, it's understandable why the Pentagon is uneasy. "Look at Bangladesh. If sea levels rise and forty percent of the country is lost to inundation, where do those millions go? They're going to India. Now we can say that's not our problem, but there are two nuclear-armed states in the region. So, from the military's perspective of risk analysis, if there's a prospect of trouble, they've got to pay attention."

For more on the politics of saving the environment, check out **THE VINE** *at www.tnr.com*

Of course, whether many of these constitute a direct threat to U.S. security interests all depends on one's view of what, exactly, U.S. security interests are—and what one thinks the military's role in the world should be. At the moment, Pentagon planners are operating on the assumption that the military, whether it likes it or not, will be called on frequently to assist in a wide variety of climate-related crises, even ones that are primarily humanitarian in nature—as was the case in 2004 after a tsunami struck Indonesia. Yet not all experts think the implications of global warming should be defined so narrowly. "When you start talking about environmental issues this way, it brings the idea that you're talking primarily about military solutions," says Daniel Deudney, a political scientist at Johns Hopkins. "And, when we're talking about climate, that's not really where the most important actions are."

It's also possible that, in a few places, the security implications of climate change have been exaggerated. It's not uncommon to see news stories hyping the notion that melting Arctic ice could create a mad scramble between the United States, Russia, Norway, and Canada for minerals and shipping lanes. Yet, as a Carnegie study of the subject found, "Overblown press coverage of Arctic security issues appears to be in inverse relationship to security realities. There are no large geopolitical fault lines, and no resource wars are anticipated."

Likewise, for years, politicians have cautioned that ebbing water supplies could lead to an outbreak of "water wars." But, experts point out, states have rarely gone to war over water—it's much more common for them to cooperate and figure out ways to share resources, as with the Nile Basin Initiative in Africa. Peter Gleick of the Pacific Institute points out that the bigger concern should be violence *within* nations over water, which erupts quite frequently—in Ethiopia, between herdsmen, or in China, between local farmers wielding bombs. "More attention has been paid to those international disputes, because everyone's worried about war," says Gleick. "Yet those sub-national conflicts are much harder to address—and fewer resources have gone toward them."

So framing climate change strictly as a national security problem for the United States may be an overly cramped way to think about the issue—even if it sells politically. Unchecked global warming will likely produce a lot of human misery around the world, but not all of that misery will create military threats. Then again, as retired General Gordon Sullivan wrote in the CNA report, there are also too many plausible high-risk scenarios to dismiss entirely. "We never have 100 percent certainty," he observed. "If you wait until you have 100 percent certainty, something bad is going to happen on the battlefield." In other words, we'd be nuts to sit back, let carbon emissions keep rising, and hope it all turns out okay.

Bradford Plumer

So Many Poets, So Little Time

This issue marks a changing of the guard. We gratefully bid farewell to C.K. Williams for his discerning and lively stint as our poetry editor, and we warmly welcome Rachel Wetzsteon to that distinguished perch. She is the author of three acclaimed books of poems—*The Other Stars*, *Home and Away*, and *Sakura Park*—as well as a critical study of Auden. A fourth collection, *Silver Roses*, is forthcoming from Persea next year. The recipient of awards from the National Poetry Series, the Ingram Merrill Foundation, and the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Wetzsteon lives in Manhattan and is currently Associate Professor of English at William Paterson University. Poems should be submitted to Wetzsteon at poetry@tnr.com. But only brilliant and beautiful poems, please.

The Beck Supremacy

How a right-wing conspiracy hijacked the thriller genre.

When Vince Flynn recently finished writing his eleventh novel, *Pursuit of Honor*, he sent an advance copy to Rush Limbaugh, along with some special reading instructions. Upon arriving at Chapter 50, he told the radio host in a note inscribed on the chapter's first page, "open one of your bottles of Lafite and grab a cigar and savor these words." Flynn self-published his first political thriller twelve years ago but, today, has a seven-figure contract with an imprint of Simon & Schuster. He is to the war on terrorism what Tom Clancy was to the cold war, and his books tend to be popular with the type of reader who, like Limbaugh, watches the TV show "24" not just for entertainment value but also for political lessons. Indeed, the protagonist of Flynn's novels, CIA counterterrorism operative Mitch Rapp, exhibits such a talent for maiming, torturing, and killing Muslim bad guys that he makes Jack Bauer look like a simpering ACLU attorney.

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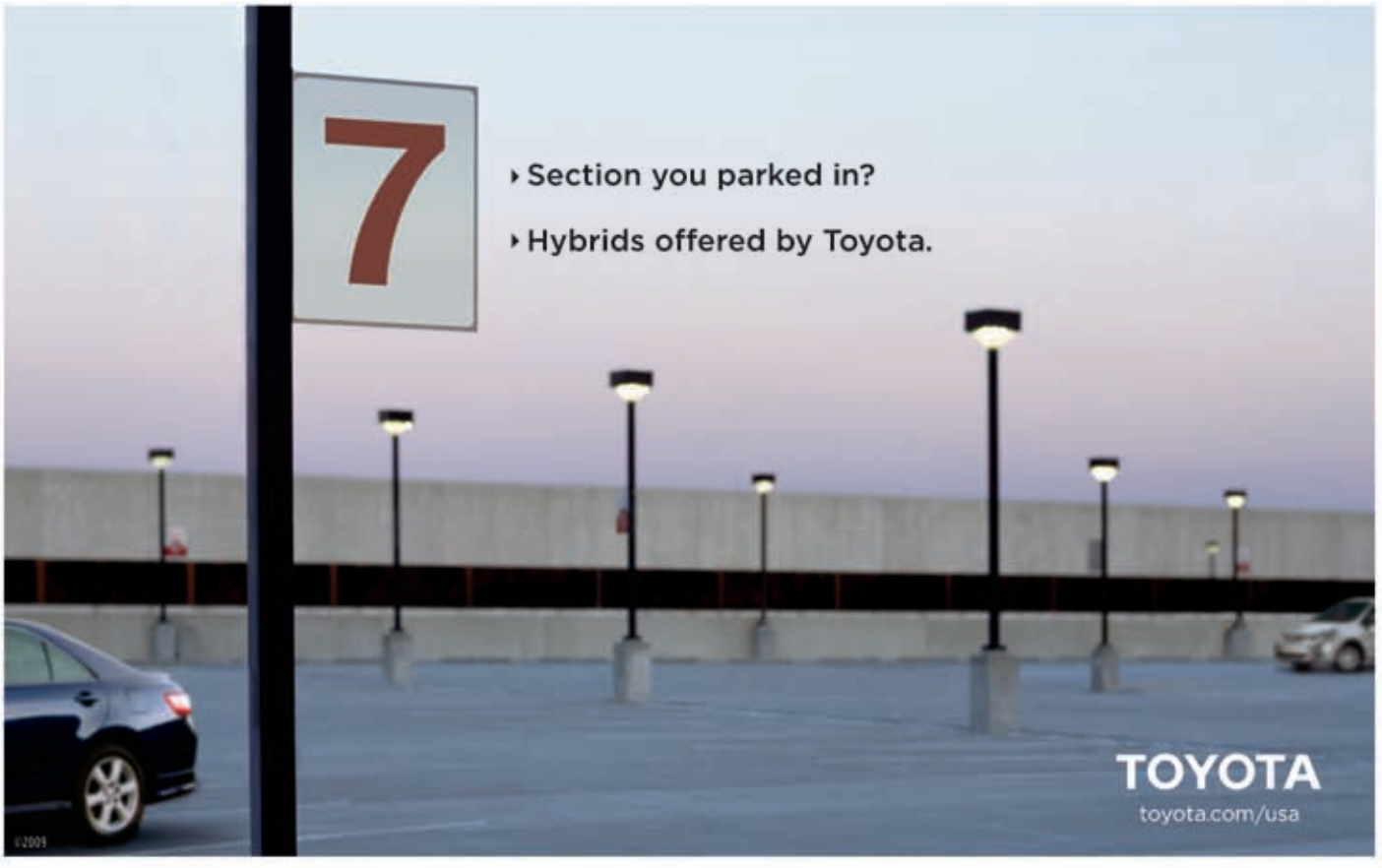
But, with Chapter 50 of *Pursuit of Honor*, Flynn appears to be angling for a new level of conservative street cred. The chapter finds Rapp sitting in front of the Senate Judiciary Committee, which has asked him to explain his torture of a Saudi terrorism suspect. After being scolded for his "immoral techniques" by Carol Ogden—a California Democrat (and thinly veiled send-up of Barbara Boxer) who "moved in the elite circles of her party, listening to the trial lawyers, academics, and the nuttiest of the crazy special-interest groups"—it's Rapp's turn to address the committee. "[W]hat do you think is more morally reprehensible," he asks, "dislocating the arm of a terrorist … or sticking a steel spike into the brain of an eight-and-a-half-month-old fetus and then sucking his brains out[?]" Reminded by one of Ogden's colleagues (a "jowly Senator from Vermont" who bears a striking resemblance to Patrick Leahy) that he is speaking in the august chambers of the U.S. Senate, Rapp shoots back: "I'm well aware of where I am, sir. This is where we not only say it's perfectly okay for a doctor to kill a full-term baby, but we think taxpayers should help pay for it. … And you call me a barbarian."

Limbaugh, not surprisingly, was impressed. On October 9, he told his listeners that, although he hadn't yet read all of *Pursuit of Honor*, "it's going to be the best [Flynn book] ever." And Rush wasn't the only conservative talker offering an aural blurb. On October 12, Glenn Beck hosted Flynn on his Fox News TV show and lavished praise on his new book—one part in particular. "Let's just say Chapter 50, I don't want to give anything away, but let me just say it's almost conservative porn," Beck gushed. Then, leaving frighteningly little to the imagination, he began to stroke himself on the arm and cooed, "You almost think, 'Oh yeah, oooh, that's erotic.' It's great!" It was Flynn, though, who received the ultimate gratification when, eleven days later, *Pursuit of Honor* debuted on *The New York Times*' best-seller list at number two, one spot behind Dan Brown.

Politicians and pundits may argue about whether Limbaugh, Beck, and their ilk have real pull at the polls, but, when it comes to selling thrillers, those who work in publishing agree: Right-wing talk jocks deliver. Beck, in particular, has become a make-or-break blurb for thriller writers, with *The New York Times* recently hailing him as the genre's Oprah. Brad Thor, who writes political thrillers about an ex-Navy SEAL battling Muslim terrorists and is a frequent guest on Beck's radio and TV shows, says, "Glenn has been one of the three best things to happen to thriller books in the last fifty years"—right up there with John F. Kennedy including Ian Fleming's *From Russia with Love* on a list of his favorite books and Ronald Reagan plugging Clancy's *The Hunt for Red October*.

The phenomenon isn't just about Beck or Limbaugh, however. Thriller writers also show up as guests of other right-wing talking heads, such as Sean Hannity and Hugh Hewitt. And a number of conservative pundits, from Rich Lowry to Oliver North, have recently tried their hand at thriller writing. This convergence of two worlds undoubtedly says a lot about the state of contemporary conservatism. But does it also say something about the state—and future—of the thriller?

Political thrillers are not inherently right-wing. Although Allen Drury, the author who arguably birthed the genre with his 1959 book *Advise and Consent*, was an arch-conservative, the writers who followed in his footsteps were an ideologically diverse bunch. For every conservative thriller writer like William F. Buckley, there was a liberal writer like Robert Ludlum. In fact, perhaps the greatest



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writer of political thrillers, John le Carré, can sound an awful lot like Michael Moore when he strays into nonfiction. (On the eve of the Iraq war, he wrote an op-ed titled, "The United States of America has gone mad.")

But, while Drury, le Carré, and other thriller writers of their era may have let their politics inform their fiction writing, they did not allow their politics to dominate it. It wasn't until Clancy's 1984 book *The Hunt for Red October*—which became a best-seller after Reagan deemed it a "perfect yarn"—that the genre had an explicitly ideological writer, and a conservative one at that. "Clancy invented something new," says Patrick Anderson, the weekly thriller reviewer for *The Washington Post* and author of *The Triumph of the Thriller*. "It was the right-wing techno thriller. It was, 'We're the toughest guys in the world, and our guys can beat their guys.'"

Of course, "their guys" in Clancy's schema were the Soviets, and the end of the cold war also spelled the end of his career as a successful novelist. For a time, it also spelled the end of the entire political-thriller genre. "Once the USSR fell apart and communism collapsed, the international thriller almost completely died, because you didn't have this big enemy anymore," says Neil Nyren, the editor-in-chief at Putnam. But September 11 changed that with the emergence of a new big enemy. And, while Clancy never quite figured out how to capitalize on the terrorist threat, writers like Flynn and Thor took his formula and successfully applied it to the war on terrorism.

In one respect, Flynn and Thor's books are popular for the same reason that Clancy's were: For all their violence, they tell what, in their own strange way, are comforting stories. "[Clancy] started writing before the collapse of the Soviet Union," Anderson explains in *The Triumph of the Thriller*, "and his message was a reassuring one: The Soviets are tough but our boys are tougher; their system is so rotten that their best men defect to us; and World War III can be fought and won without nuclear weapons." Flynn and Thor deliver similar reassurances. "After 9/11," says Emily Bestler, who edits both writers for the Simon & Schuster imprint Atria, "people were wanting to read in the comfortable setting of their living room a story that actually had us winning at the end, instead of the big question mark we face in reality. You close the novel and you can say, 'At least we won that round.'"

But there is an underlying fear and paranoia running through Flynn and Thor's political thrillers that was missing from Clancy's. It's that sense of menace—as much as any sense of reassurance—that accounts for these books' popularity with right-wing talk-show hosts, who, after all, are in the business of convincing listeners and viewers that both they and their country are in constant peril.

It's no surprise, then, that thriller writers often appear on conservative shows as political experts. Take Flynn, for instance. Prior to becoming a thriller writer, he worked in sales for Kraft Foods, but, these days, he routinely goes on Beck's show and other Fox News programs as a national security analyst. "We have allowed the far left in this country to define torture down, to encompass everything," he told Bill O'Reilly last December.

When it comes to selling thrillers, right-wing talk jocks deliver.

Thor performs a similar function, but he has better range. Sometimes he plays the role of Islamic scholar, thanks to his novel *The Last Patriot*, which Beck has described as "*The Da Vinci Code* for Islam, except *The Da Vinci Code* was so much more fiction than this is." "Islam has some very dark, very scary skeletons in its closet that it does not want out there," Thor once told Beck. At other times, Thor turns his eye to domestic politics: Asked by Beck whether "foreign operatives" were at work inside the United States, Thor replied, "I have no doubts. I think they're here. I think some of them even hold public office." Whatever Beck and his producers need, Thor, who used to work in television himself as the host of a travel show, is ready to provide it. He explains, "Any time they call me and say, 'They just whacked this guy outside of Islamabad, can you come on and talk about his network?' I'm happy to do it."

Even a thriller writer who's reluctant to serve as a conservative talk jock's "expert" may be loath to pass up an increasingly rare opportunity to promote his book. Political thrillers are seldom reviewed in *The New York Times*; and, while their authors used to pop up for interviews on the "Today" show or Larry King's old radio program, those days are gone. Meanwhile, the new breed of liberal television pundit isn't interested in hosting political thriller writers, either. "I'd love to be on Rachel [Maddow] or Olbermann—I watch both shows regularly, and I know my publicists have pitched each one, without success," says thriller author Joseph Finder, who has appeared on Beck and Hannity's programs. "So, for me, it's a no-brainer—you go where you're wanted. And believe me, I'm grateful to Glenn and Sean for the opportunity."

Of course, Beck and other conservative talkers have only so many guest slots that they can give to novelists—which raises the question of whether the competition to get on these programs will come to define the genre. "Most thriller writers tend not to be politically identified—not publicly, anyway, because they want to sell books and not turn off potential readers," says Finder. "But I've noticed that those few who are open about their politics tend to be conservative, largely because the market favors that." Mark Tavani, an editor at Ballantine Books, fears the political-thriller genre may be heading toward one-party domination. "If it starts to feel like these books are only being represented by conservative hosts to an audience that watches their shows, then it'll start to feel like that's not the book for me if I'm a liberal," he says. "If you don't introduce it to both sides, it's going to feel like it's limited to just one audience."

After all, if a thriller writer wants to ingratiate himself to a right-wing talk jock, he doesn't need to lavish him with cigars or wine. The talk jock will bring his own. All the writer needs to do is supply the conservative porn.

Jason Zengerle

Reset Button

The gaffes of Hillary Clinton.

When Barack Obama tapped Hillary Clinton to be his secretary of state, the typical reaction came in two stages. The first was to think it was nuts. How could two blood rivals possibly make good foreign policy together? The second, a reconsideration, was to think it a stroke of genius. Secretary of state is a job that demands

David Cowles

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Blue Dog Sucker Update:

While You Walk the Plank, Harry Reid Says Senate Won't Vote Until 2010

Keep Walking the Plank, House Members!

It's like a bad pirate movie.

Blue Dogs and moderates sticking their necks out to support Nancy Pelosi's agenda of big government, higher taxes, and more regulation.

They cast liberal votes that could risk their careers, while the bills they support go nowhere in the Senate.

It's already happened with cap-and-trade. And government-run health care is next.

House members cast bad votes, while the Senate dithers and leaves them hanging.

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extreme dedication and diligence, requiring its occupant to learn the fine details of everything from the Kashmir dispute to Taiwanese independence—and to articulate U.S. policy with flawless precision. Who could be better for this task than Clinton? As a senator, after all, she had made her name as a policy wonk who actually enjoyed reading to the end of her briefing books—and one who, moreover, was known for an almost animatronic ability to stay on message. Barack Obama is said to have marveled at her relentless message discipline over two dozen Democratic primary debates. In selecting her a year ago, *The New York Times* reported, aides said he "recognized that Clinton had far more discipline and focus than her husband."

A year later, Obama might be rethinking that assumption. The hallmark of Hillary's tenure as America's top diplomat has hardly been robotic precision. It has instead been a curious propensity for public statements that require amendment, clarification, and implicit retraction—as illustrated, most recently, by comments she made about Israeli settlement policy that reportedly baffled even her own aides. Perhaps because she is a smart and independent-minded woman, Hillary has taken a self-consciously blunt-speaking approach to her job and shows no sign of apologizing for it. "She's candid," says State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley. "And, if you look at the response she's received around the world, I think most people appreciate it." But it's not a style in keeping with a White House that generally demands complete message control. For a president who hates drama, Barack Obama has installed a secretary of state who keeps creating it. A closer look at her recent history suggests that perhaps he shouldn't be surprised.

The first sign that Hillary's lips might be surprisingly loose came on her very first official trip—a swing through Asia in February. Aboard her government jet, Clinton spoke with reporters about prospects for the replacement of the ailing North Korean dictator Kim Jong Il. The longtime diplomatic writers were startled; Clinton had broken what the *Times* called "an informal taboo" on the subject, which, tellingly, neither she nor top Obama officials seem to have publicly revisited since. More dramatically, on that same trip, Hillary unexpectedly dismissed the role of human rights in U.S.-China relations. Such concerns, she explained, "can't interfere" with issues like global warming and the economy. "[W]e pretty much know what [Chinese leaders] are going to say" anyway, she shrugged. Human rights advocates were appalled, and State Department officials traveling with her reportedly debated whether she had been refreshingly candid or had committed a colossal blunder.

More memorable, if less consequential, was Clinton's August trip to Africa, which featured a town-hall-style meeting in Congo. Tired and frayed after several days of travel on the continent, Hillary lost her patience with a questioner who asked her husband's view of an obscure World Bank policy. "My husband is not secretary of state, I am," she snapped. "I am not going to be channeling my husband." Clinton's aides initially suggested that a mistranslation was to blame—that, in fact, the questioner had inquired about Barack Obama's views, not Bill Clinton's. That turned out not to be the case. Predictably, a media frenzy obscured the message of Hillary's visit (which included spotlighting the use of sex crimes as a tool of war in Central Africa). After so many years in the public eye, however, Hillary should have appreciated the distracting effect her quick temper would have.

There have been other curious rhetorical flourishes. Speaking again about North Korea, Clinton likened the country to an "unruly teenager" who throws periodic tantrums. While her observation is correct, the language was jarring coming from a government official—particularly when it emerged that Bill Clinton was, at that same time, arranging a visit to Pyongyang to accept the release of two detained American journalists. Then there was her recent visit to Pakistan. While there, Hillary admirably parried anti-American abuse in public forums, but the pressure pushed her into a comment that undercut her mission. During one meeting with several ornery Pakistani journalists, Clinton "appeared to get annoyed," as one local paper wrote, and snapped that she found it "hard to believe that nobody in your government knows where [Al Qaeda leaders] are and couldn't get them if they really wanted to." After her rejoinder got a testy reception in the Pakistani media, Hillary "carefully scaled back her comments," as the Associated Press wrote, insisting that she didn't believe Pakistan harbors terrorists. Crowley says Clinton has no regrets. "To the extent that there is a change in approach to the world," he says, "it involves a genuine dialogue, not just a delivery of polite diplomatic points."

Though none of these comments had a tangible impact on U.S. foreign policy, the same can't be said about two episodes in which Clinton veered away from the White House's message on the Middle East peace process. The first came in May, when Clinton revealed at a press conference that Obama's call for an Israeli settlement freeze included any "natural growth" within existing settlements. The circumstances remain murky, but two sources with detailed knowledge of the U.S.-Israel relationship say that the Obama team was not yet prepared to make public this departure from Bush-era policy. Rather than leave his secretary of state twisting in the wind, says one of the sources, Obama wound up repeating her formulation a few days later, touching off months of tension with the Israelis.

The second flap occurred on November 1 in Jerusalem, where Clinton abruptly reversed course on settlements—this time saying that a proposal by the Netanyahu government that falls short of the freeze Obama has sought nevertheless amounts to an "unprecedented" concession by Israel. The formulation—which infuriated Arab leaders and made it seem that Obama had surrendered to Netanyahu—had not been endorsed by the White House, which was not pleased with the statement. The *Times* subsequently reported that even Clinton's aides considered the remark poorly worded. "Our leading diplomat is very undiplomatic," says a Democratic official with a Jewish organization in Washington. "Sometimes that's helpful, sometimes it's not."

En route to Egypt earlier this month, Hillary Clinton appeared in the press cabin of her plane bearing chocolates for her press corps. Not that she has much love for them: On one seven-day trip earlier this year, she spoke to journalists just once. It's an old Hillary duality—disdain for the media coupled with occasional efforts at outreach. When she campaigned through Iowa as a presidential candidate, she would sometimes appear on her press bus—where she almost never made herself available for questions—to pass out bagels and coffee to reporters.

It's a reminder that, in some ways, Hillary the candidate never disappeared. When Clinton travels the world, her trips can have a campaign-like feel. She still keeps an exhausting schedule of public events and town halls—only now in destinations like Beijing and Kinshasa instead of Concord and Ottumwa. Following her are some familiar faces from the old Hillaryland gang, including her confidante and personal aide, Huma Abedin, and her former Senate press secretary, Philippe Reines. (Her chief of staff, Cheryl Mills, typically remains in

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HEALTH CARE REFORM
WILL IT WORK?

On October 27, *The New Republic* hosted the definitive conference on the health care reform debate, led by **Jonathan Cohn**. The conversation focused on affordable coverage, insurance exchanges, and promoting quality and efficiency.

Participants included:

Shannon Brownlee
Senior Research Fellow
New America Foundation

Jonathan Cohn
Senior Editor
The New Republic

Rep. Jim Cooper
(D-TN)

Nancy-Ann DeParle
Counselor to the President and Director, White House Office of Health Reform

Franklin Foer
Editor
The New Republic

George Halvorson
Chairman and CEO
Kaiser Permanente

Jon Kingsdale
Executive Director
Commonwealth Health Insurance Connector

Harold Pollack
Professor
University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration

Dennis Rivera
Chair
SEIU Healthcare

Rep. Anthony Weiner
(D-NY)

Senator Ron Wyden
(D-OR)

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Dennis Rivera, Rep. Jim Cooper, Sen. Ron Wyden, Rep. Anthony Weiner, Jonathan Cohn

"It will help families, businesses, and government. It won't add a dime to the deficit in the short run and, over the longer term, we believe it will bring down the unsustainable growth in the cost."
—*Nancy-Ann DeParle*

Nancy-Ann DeParle

"The reality is that, if we end up with a piece of legislation that provides choice and competition to just ten percent of the population and just tethers everyone else to unaffordable, monopolistic coverage, it's going to be hard to get reform."
—*Sen. Ron Wyden*

Sen. Ron Wyden

Franklin Foer

Rep. Anthony Weiner

George Halvorson

"Every other country has a safety net, and America doesn't have a safety net. That's particularly criminal because we literally spend twice as much money on care as all of these other countries. Twice as much money on our care infrastructure as those countries spend, and we leave forty million people uninsured, thirty million people underinsured, twenty million people transitionally insured. We have a lot of people in a bad position economically, relative to coverage, and we're spending a multiple of what other countries spend, so that's why ... we need to finally get universal coverage."
—*George Halvorson*

"We are missing a giant opportunity here to take a look at this experiment we've had for forty-four years, of Medicare in a single-payer system, government administered, side by side with private insurance, and say, 'Which one is more efficient?' Tell me what it is that insurance companies do. Tell me what value they're adding to the system. They're not even doing what insurance companies do, which is apportion risk over the entire system. They're saying, 'We're not going to cover anyone over sixty-five or anyone who gets sick. So the idea that they're apportioning risk is simply not happening. And yet, saying that people who are uninsured, we're going to give them money to go buy health insurance, which is projected to keep going up at the same rate—it's folly. It's better than nothing, but just barely better than nothing."
—*Rep. Anthony Weiner*

Rep. Jim Cooper

Mike Aitken, Franklin Foer, Mike Rancilio, Lisa Horn, Lon O'Neil

George Halvorson, Jon Kingsdale, Shannon Brownlee, Harold Pollack

Shannon Brownlee

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Washington, leaving deputy chief of staff Jake Sullivan to oversee the road show.)

Perhaps the campaign feel helps to explain some of Hillary's verbal burps. While many people think of Clinton as scripted and cautious, other facets of her personality—temper, self-assurance, sarcasm—have always broken through her robotic façade. Indeed, the hyper-disciplined Hillary of memory is an exaggeration. When she was a presidential candidate, Clinton's mouth repeatedly caused her trouble. Think back: There was her surprisingly inept stumble at a pivotal debate on the subject of driver's licenses for illegal immigrants; her false recollection of landing under sniper fire in Bosnia in the 1990s; her angry outburst of "shame on you, Barack Obama!" at an Ohio press conference; and her utterly tone-deaf invocation of Bobby Kennedy's 1968 assassination as a reason for continuing her campaign even after Obama had effectively sewn up the Democratic nomination. "Hillary's message discipline is more myth than reality," says one former aide to her 2008 presidential campaign. "The campaign lived in regular fear that she'd say something to throw us off message."

Mistakes on the trail can cost votes. But loose talk in diplomacy can make it hard for enemies and allies alike to know what's coming off the cuff and what represents official U.S. policy. Which is why Barack Obama may be pining for the Hillary Clinton he thought he knew.

Michael Crowley

Docudrama

Client X reveals the secret truth about health care reform.

Ask doctors, hospitals, drugmakers, or insurers for their opinion of President Obama's health care proposals, and you'll likely get an earful about how reform will severely hurt their bottom line. Ask many liberals, and you'll hear the opposite complaint: that the current incarnation of reform won't affect these industries enough to significantly alter their behavior.

Now there's a document that suggests both sides are wrong: The medical-care industry *would* need to make significant, and socially beneficial, changes in response to the bills currently moving through Congress; but such changes won't come remotely close to destroying the industry's profitability. Of course, reports on health care come out all the time. But this one deserves special attention—because it was prepared by the nation's most famous consulting firm and was never meant to see the light of day.

Sometime in August, McKinsey & Company created a PowerPoint document called "Health Care Reform and Implications for Key Stakeholders: What this Could Mean for Client X." Over the course of 44 slides full of charts and graphs, the firm examines the potential impact of reform on insurers, doctors, hospitals, and the drug industry. McKinsey tells Client X that the presentation's purpose is to "help inform your understanding of the broader healthcare system impact and what this might mean for your key customers and Client X going forward." After a source supplied me with the document—which is marked "confidential"—I contacted McKinsey. A spokesperson told me that "Client X" is not a particular company. Instead, he explained, the document is a broad overview of how McKinsey expects health care reform to play out. (It also appears to be a presentation that McKinsey consultants could adapt based on a client's particular situation.)

Although legislation has evolved, McKinsey's predictions about reform's basic design and scope seem right on target, which is no small achievement. Remember that, in August, it seemed entirely possible Congress would pass no health care reform at all. But McKinsey identifies as the "most probable outcome" passage of a bill with somewhere between $750 billion and $1.05 trillion in federal outlays, a functional insurance exchange, a possible cap on the employer tax benefit, some cuts in reimbursements, and a severely watered-down public option. That outline describes, with uncanny precision, the bill Congress will probably pass sometime in the next two months.

But it's the forecasts about what reform will mean afterward that matter to McKinsey's clients. And perhaps the most surprising element of McKinsey's analysis is its prediction that legislation really will force the medical-care industry to change its ways.

The bills moving through Congress use a number of strategies to induce such change. On the one hand, there are relatively heavy-handed efforts that would simply cut (or attempt to cut) the sheer volume of cash flowing into health care: reduced fees to insurance companies that offer private coverage to Medicare enrollees, a tax on the most expensive health insurance plans that would prod employers and individuals to buy cheaper coverage, and a dramatic strengthening of the commission that recommends changes in Medicare payments.

At the same time, the bills include more narrowly focused reforms. There would be bonuses for doctors who organize into integrated group practices, which tend to foster better care. There would be penalties for hospitals that have high rates of avoidable readmissions. And there would be funding for studies of which drugs work better than others, so that Medicare and insurers could stop paying for the less effective alternatives.

McKinsey seems convinced that this entire package of reforms will influence behavior. Over and over again, it tells Client X that the world is changing. Hospitals, McKinsey says, will face "increased requirements to coordinate care across system/care continuum," "significantly more value-conscious consumer decision-making," and "intensified focus on performance measurement and improvement." It has even starker warnings for the drug industry: "Big Pharma faces the largest potential revenue risk," the document predicts. Partly that's because of existing trends in the drug industry. But it's also because studies of comparative effectiveness are sure to reduce the sale of drugs that don't work as well. McKinsey suggests that the drug industry can survive and even thrive in this environment "by focusing on 'productive' innovation (supported by strong evidence), collaborating with payors and providers in new ways, and revamping commercial and R&D models to significantly improve effectiveness and efficiency."

These are precisely the sorts of changes that the architects of reform want the drug industry—and, more broadly, the entire health care sector—to make. "One generally comes away with the sense that [McKinsey] sees reform as changing incentives, first more modestly and then, potentially, in a more fundamental way in later years," says Larry Levitt, vice president for special projects at the Kaiser Family Foundation, who reviewed the document at TNR's request. "That's a good sign."

Meanwhile, McKinsey's analysis suggests that—as long as they adjust to the new incentives—doctors, hospitals, and insurers will be just fine. While predictions carry uncertainty, McKinsey states, "it appears that providers overall (both hospitals and doctors) and payors may be largely unharmed (but with lots of variation across them)." "One comes away with the impression that this is also very manageable for the various sectors and, at least in the case of hospitals, maybe a net positive," Levitt says.

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To be sure, McKinsey's recommendations track closely with the firm's self-interest. As a consultant that sells strategic advice on how to adapt to changing markets, McKinsey wants companies to believe, on the one hand, that dramatic changes are coming—but, on the other hand, that they can still prosper if they follow McKinsey's advice.

Still, McKinsey's report struck me as well-reasoned, and the conclusions themselves are hardly outlandish. Moreover, everyone—from McKinsey to the Congressional Budget Office to think tanks—has biases, and no one is operating with perfect information. So I don't think McKinsey's conclusions can be dismissed out of hand. And if they're right? Then it's decent news for Client X, and better news for the rest of us.

Jonathan Cohn

Stupak is as Stupak Does

The real cost of that abortion amendment.

Is it worth sacrificing health care reform for ideological purity on abortion? That's the question Democrats are facing after House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, to avoid derailing health care legislation, reluctantly accepted an amendment offered by Michigan Democrat Bart Stupak that prohibits people who receive any federal health care subsidies from buying insurance plans that cover abortion. More than 40 liberal House Democrats have promised to vote against any final bill that includes the provision, but that risks alienating the 40 House Democrats who voted for both the amendment and the House's health care bill, as well as some Senate moderates. President Obama has vowed to maintain the status quo on abortion and hinted that it's possible to imagine a more moderate abortion compromise. But, if the compromise doesn't materialize, pragmatic pro-choice Democrats are likely to make the same calculation as Pelosi: The Stupak amendment is objectionable in principle, but it's not worth scuttling health care reform in practice. This is a wrenching political choice that will have negative consequences, but there may not be any escape.

How many women would the Stupak amendment affect? It wouldn't immediately impinge on the roughly 60 million women ages 18-64 who presently get health insurance through their jobs or their spouses' jobs rather than through Medicare. At least in the short term, nothing would change for these women because they wouldn't receive any federal funds. But most of them aren't reimbursed for abortion coverage under the current system. There's a debate about how many private health care plans cover abortion—estimates have ranged from 46 percent to nearly 87 percent. But, regardless of the number, the Guttmacher Institute found that only 13 percent of all abortions in 2001 were directly billed to private insurance companies. Some women may have filed for reimbursement on their own; others may have been reluctant to file claims because they didn't want their employers or spouses to know they had abortions; and other women were uninsured. Nevertheless, 74 percent of women who had abortions paid for them out of pocket.

That doesn't mean the Stupak amendment would maintain the status quo on abortion funding. It would restrict the choices of women who buy private health insurance on the new health-insurance exchange designed to provide affordable coverage. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that, under the House bill, 21 million Americans would buy insurance through the exchange by 2019. This group would include some of the 17 million women, ages 18-64, who are currently

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uninsured (and, obviously, don't receive any abortion coverage) and some of the 5.7 million women currently purchasing coverage through the market rather than through employers—including self-employed and unemployed women, and those whose jobs don't offer benefits.

It's some subset of this last group—the women who switch from private plans that now cover abortion to private plans on the federal exchange—who would be most affected by the changes. The overwhelming majority of people who buy private insurance on the exchange will be receiving federal affordability credits, and the Stupak amendment says that, if you receive a federal subsidy, you can't buy insurance that covers abortion. (The amendment allows women who are farsighted enough to plan for unplanned pregnancies to buy a single-service abortion-insurance "rider," but, in practice, past experience suggests these riders won't be readily available.) "The bottom line seems to be that abortion coverage, if it exists at all on the exchange, will be rare," says Adam Sonfield of the Guttmacher Institute. This may not be a great financial burden for the majority of women who have first-trimester abortions, which are relatively cheap—in 2006, the average cost of a first-trimester abortion was $413—but it could represent a more serious burden for women who have later-term abortions, which are more expensive.

Of course, if the exchange succeeds in providing affordable coverage, as Democrats hope it will, more women may switch from their current self-insured plans to exchange plans. The more health care reform succeeds, in other words, the more reproductive access will suffer. And efforts to control costs will suffer too, since childbirth is far more expensive than abortion.

Is there a way out of this trap? There's no question that the compromise originally championed by some House Democrats was far preferable as a matter of principle and policy. It would have required private insurance companies on the exchange—as well as the new public option—to create segregated funds to ensure that only private, rather than federal, dollars subsidize abortion coverage. The model is the 1976 Hyde amendment, which prohibits the use of federal funds to reimburse the cost of most abortions under Medicaid but allows the states to subsidize abortions for Medicaid recipients on their own. (Seventeen states use public money to fund abortions for some poor women.) Pro-life groups have resisted the segregation of public and private funds, arguing that the two are ultimately fungible. (They are less concerned about fungibility when it comes to federal grants for soup kitchens run by churches, which can then free up funds to celebrate Mass.) At this point, perhaps the most promising compromise for moderate Democrats would be to drop abortion coverage in the public plan but allow women on the exchange, including those receiving federal subsidies, to purchase private plans that include abortion coverage. But that compromise may be resisted by both pro-choice and pro-life purists and, thus, may not be politically feasible.

Let's imagine that it's impossible to pass a health care bill without a version of the Stupak amendment. Might the Supreme Court strike the amendment down? In upholding the Hyde amendment in 1980, the Court stressed that Congress could refuse to subsidize medically necessary abortions because it left "an indigent woman with at least the same range of choice … as she would have had if Congress had chosen to subsidize no health care costs at all." By contrast, the Stupak amendment doesn't leave self-employed women who receive federal subsidies with the same range of choice: It makes it much harder for them to find alternative coverage for abortion and therefore, in practice, leaves the federal government less neutral toward abortion than even the Hyde amendment. For this reason, it's possible that some liberal Supreme Court justices might conclude that the Stupak amendment violates the Constitution. But this argument is unlikely to convince a majority of the Roberts Court, which means that pro-choice Democrats shouldn't count on the Court to bail them out.

In short, abortion is one area where the common ground Obama seeks may not exist. In that case, the president may conclude, like Nancy Pelosi, that it's not worth sacrificing health care reform over an important but ultimately peripheral battle in the culture wars. If giving millions of uninsured women access to life-saving procedures like dialysis and chemotherapy requires making it harder for a much smaller number of self-insured women to get abortion coverage, the pragmatic calculation is understandable. But that doesn't make it any less frustrating.

Jeffrey Rosen

General Malaise

Burma's junta plays us again.

From the hills outside Mandalay, Burma's second city, the vista resembles a postcard of Asian serenity. Monks climb stone steps to a hillside shrine, where local men and women leave offerings of flowers and fruit. But the placid scene conceals one of the most repressive states in the world—a state that the Obama administration has decided may be more worthy of American friendship than American threats.

For more than four decades, Burma's junta has persecuted its population. In conflict-torn eastern Burma, the army reportedly employs state-sanctioned rape of women and girls, conscription of local children, and the burning of villages. Nearly one million Burmese have fled to neighboring countries, while those who stay are sometimes press-ganged into forced labor, during which, numerous reports reveal, they may be beaten or even killed. Dissent, of course, is virtually unthinkable. According to the documentary film *Burma VJ*, which chronicles the monk-led 2007 Saffron Revolution, troops raided monasteries after the protests, beating monks and tossing their dead bodies into creeks. The junta, meanwhile, has run the economy into the ground, while the regime's senior leaders live in opulence.

This record of atrocity doesn't seem to have dissuaded the current administration in Washington from attempting to engage the Burmese regime. After more than a decade during which U.S. administrations have isolated the junta through sanctions, visa bans, and other measures, the Obama administration has decided to re-engage. Speaking to a group of foreign ministers in New York this September, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced that "[e]ngagement versus sanctions is a false choice, in our opinion. … To help achieve democratic reform, we will be engaging directly with Burmese authorities."

The Burmese regime seemed to respond quickly to Washington's warmth. Only weeks after the administration's new policy was announced, the junta allowed foreign envoys in Burma to meet with opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been held under house arrest on and off for nearly two decades. Then, last week, Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell became the highest-level American official to visit Burma in more than a decade; he also was allowed to meet with Suu Kyi. A commentary in Burma's state-run *New Light of Myan-*

ANTHONY RUSSO

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mar newspaper, normally vehemently anti-Western, captured this new mood. Burma and the United States, it sunnily declared, had taken "the first step toward marching to a 1,000-mile destination."

Don't expect to see the end of that march any time soon. Over the past two decades, the junta has used similar promises of rapprochement to get what it wants from the outside world. With each fake new dawn, the Burmese generals have skillfully played the international community for fools, promising the West just enough to win aid and investment without ever really releasing the junta's stranglehold on power.

Launched last winter, the Obama administration's Burma policy review accompanied its decision to re-engage with other rogue actors like Iran, North Korea, and Sudan. Overall, the Obama administration apparently decided, there was no harm in talking to anyone, even the most destructive governments: Engaging would show the world that the isolationist George W. Bush was really gone, might actually deliver policy results that isolation could not, and could prevent the United States from losing the diplomatic game to China, which is always willing to deal with dictatorships.

When it came to Burma, the United States has decided, for now, to deal with the generals, and possibly help the long-suffering Burmese population. As one senior State Department official recently told me, "We're moving forward to reach out to them no matter what they did in the past." The administration, he said, plans to initiate high-level meetings between junta officials and State Department power players like Campbell. State will also start thinking up ways to work with China, the junta's closest ally, to deliver more assistance to Burma. Already, the administration has allowed Burmese Foreign Minister Major General Nyan Win a rare visit to Washington. "These are the types of outreach we think [the junta] will respond to," the State Department official said.

To date, the Burmese have fed this optimism. This year, the junta allowed Stephen Blake, a senior American diplomat, to visit the country and meet with its foreign minister, the first time such a high-ranking State Department policymaker had gone to Burma in nearly a decade. Meanwhile, in August, Senator Jim Webb, who heads the East Asia and Pacific Affairs Subcommittee of the Foreign Relations Committee, visited the nation, scoring an unusual audience with the dour, dough-faced junta leader Senior General Than Shwe, who normally disdains meeting foreigners. The junta also allowed Webb to meet with Suu Kyi.

Yet optimists like Webb ignore recent history at their peril: Time and again, the Burmese regime has softened just enough to win concessions, before reverting to its natural state. In the mid-1990s, the junta, hobbled by international isolation, made similar promises. It began wooing investment from the United States, Japan, and neighboring Southeast Asian nations, and it allowed Suu Kyi and her party more freedom to operate. Foreign investors flocked to Burma, which boasts abundant natural resources and architectural wonders that could make it a tourist magnet. During that period, Burma's neighbors invited it to join the most important regional organization, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, an honor the regime had craved.

Yet, by the end of that decade, the junta had turned its back on the world. Having reaped enough foreign investment to keep the economy afloat, and clearly fearful that any more opening could threaten the regime's hold on power, the junta cracked down. It started seizing assets it wanted, and it placed Suu Kyi under total house arrest once again, shuttering many offices of her party.

In 2002 and 2003, desperate for aid and investment, the junta again fooled the outside world. At the time, many foreign Burma-watchers saw Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt, the urbane head of military intelligence and main interlocutor with foreign nations, as a supposed "moderate." Khin Nyunt announced a "road map to democracy" and again freed Suu Kyi. New aid money flowed into Burma. Sitting at the posh Traders Hotel in Rangoon in late 2002, I listened to Western diplomats confidently predict that Burma would witness real political opening within the next two years.

But—surprise—the regime once again shut down. Hard-liners, likely scared by the vast crowds Suu Kyi was attracting, returned to the strategy they knew best. In May 2003, thugs suspected of links to the regime attacked Suu Kyi's motorcade on a rural road, killing at least 70 people; again, Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest. The junta began slapping restrictions on foreign aid organizations, or forcing them out of the country altogether. Frustrated, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria, one of the most prominent international health organizations, simply pulled out of Burma in 2005. Even Khin Nyunt could not escape the crackdown: Regime hard-liners jailed hundreds of his associates and placed the general himself under house arrest.

Today, the junta again has reasons for appearing to open up to the world. This time, the regime seems desperate to gain leverage over China, its main foreign ally and investor, by obtaining more independence from Beijing. "They want to be closer to the U.S. because they don't want to be reliant on us," says one Chinese diplomat.

Twice-burned, those who know Burma aren't buying its current act. "The junta will be anxious to give the appearance of responding to the U.S. outreach, while hoping to avoid any real commitments," says Sean Turnell, who runs *Burma Economic Watch*, probably the most authoritative publication on the country. "I think the [junta] … is simply testing out what they might perceive as an administration they might be able to fool."

Indeed, no serious Burma specialist believes the 2010 national elections planned by the junta will be much more than a sham. Similarly, even as the junta has cozied up to the United States, it has unleashed its forces against ethnic-minority militias. In August, thousands of Kokang, a minority group, fled into China, but not before the military killed at least 200, including many civilians, according to the Kokang.

To be sure, a decade of sanctions and isolation neither brought down the military regime nor fostered real economic reform inside the country. Yet engaging with the junta has dangers as well. It can undermine dissidents and human rights activists, now unsure whether Washington will stand behind them. Experts also believe that financial aid sent to Burma for starving populations is likely to be siphoned off by the regime. Finally, engaging with a brutal regime could make it harder to get any international consensus on sanctions again.

The White House, however, seems ready to be burned a third time. And what happens when Burma's regime reverts to form? "If you ask them [the administration's Burma policymakers], 'What are you going to do if the regime doesn't respond?,' they don't seem to have an idea," says one prominent D.C.-based Burma activist who consults closely with the State Department. "So what will they do when the junta doesn't change?"

Joshua Kurlantzick

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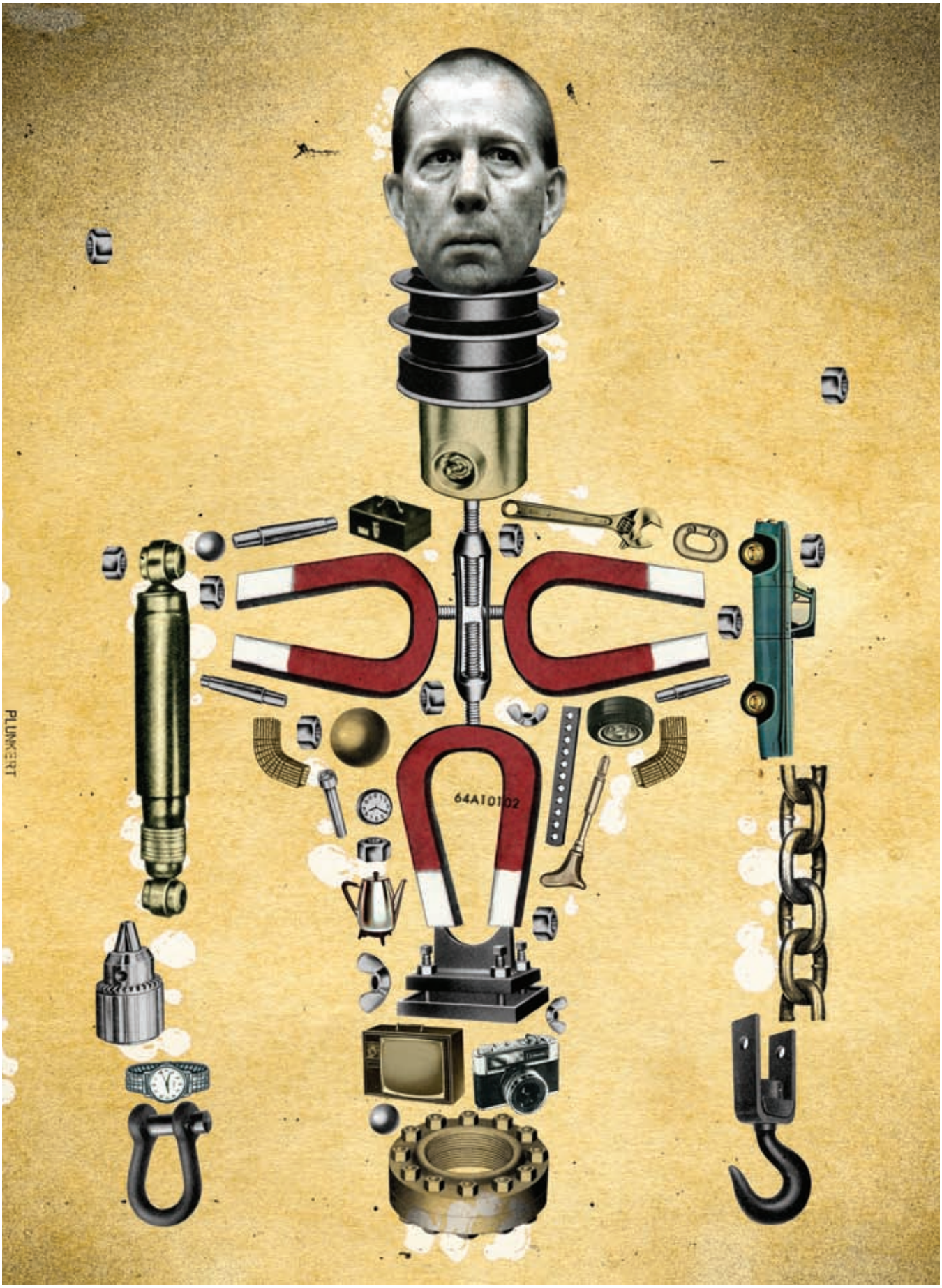

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Manufacturing Bloom

The proletarian schlub who might just save American industry.

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A few weeks after the 2008 presidential election, United Steelworkers President Leo Gerard got a call from an Obama transition aide frantic for advice on the collapsing auto industry. Gerard put his numbers guy on the call, a former investment banker named Ron Bloom, who proceeded to offer a detailed disquisition on the financial situations of GM and Chrysler. Unlike other experts the transition team had consulted, Bloom was refreshingly blunt about the companies' prospects, which he deemed grim. "We were like, 'Wow, who is this guy?' " recalls the aide.

At the time, few in Washington had ever heard of Bloom, much less pegged him for a top administration job. But, several times a week through the end of January, Bloom would chat with Team Obama by phone about the auto restructuring. Every now and then, he'd climb into his beat-up Ford Taurus and drive the four-and-a-half hours from his home in Pittsburgh to Washington in order to share his thoughts. He was not yet on the government payroll, but it gradually became clear that he was angling to stay. "I don't think it's because he wanted a cool job," says the aide. "It sounds sappy, but he just wanted to come down and save the auto industry."

Bloom, in his mid-fifties, is tall and pale with brown hair that he wears in a buzz cut. His cheeks sag slightly and his eyes slant down toward his temples, giving him a natural dourness he sometimes exaggerates for effect. Bloom knew a thing or two about playing a weak hand. As the top steelworker official in charge of financial restructuring, he'd kept dozens of mills open when their owners were determined to shutter them. (He once went so far as to engineer a hostile takeover of a company called Wheeling-Pitt, whose management he deemed uncooperative.) Bloom has summed up his approach to these situations as "dentist-chair bargaining"—in which the patient "grabs the dentist by the balls and says, 'Now let's not hurt each other.' "

Alas, such tactics wouldn't be necessary to get the job. In February, the Treasury Department tapped Bloom to be a deputy to Steve Rattner, the head of the administration's auto task force. Within four months, Bloom had managed the negotiation that plucked Chrysler from its deathbed and married it off to Fiat, making him perhaps the most successful yenta in corporate history.

As a reward, the president gave him the one task even more intractable than saving the auto industry: saving the *industry* industry. In September, the White House named Bloom the country's manufacturing czar. Suffice it to say, it is not a situation in which Bloom appears to hold many cards. The number of U.S. manufacturing jobs fell from 17 million to under twelve million during the last eight years, and few economists believe they will ever return. The fact that rivals, backed by foreign governments, are targeting U.S. market share makes it even less likely. To succeed, Bloom will have to find non-obvious advantages and leverage them relentlessly. Which turns out to be exactly what he does best.

In 1983, Bloom was a young organizer at the Service Employees International Union in Boston when an ally lost a leadership election. While casting about for his next move, Bloom read a book called *The North Will Rise Again*. At the time, global competition was laying waste to domestic manufacturing, prompting companies to slash their labor costs. The book urged unions to exert influence on management through the stock they owned in their pension funds.

Bloom found the idea compelling but figured he'd need an MBA to put such concepts into practice. Knowing almost nothing about business, he set his sights on the most prestigious program in the country: Harvard. An acquaintance put him in touch with a Harvard business professor, whom he asked for a recommendation; he nailed down another one from a prominent labor lawyer. Bloom made the same pitch to everyone: There are 800 students at Harvard Business School who aspire to be managers or investors. Shouldn't Harvard have one who aspires to work in a union? It worked.

After graduation, Bloom spent several years at the investment bank Lazard Frères, where he split his time between standard deal-making and representing unions. Then, in 1990, he and a colleague named Gene Keilin left to open their own boutique restructuring firm. One of Bloom's first assignments there was a mill called Algoma, in remote Sault Ste. Marie, Canada. The job would help him appreciate the leverage labor had even in a situation that seemed hopeless.

When Bloom showed up at "The Soo," as it was known, Algoma's owner had filed for bankruptcy protection and was readying a restructuring plan that called for brutal job cuts. The showdown with the union came a few months later at a meeting in downtown Toronto. Management, flanked by its bankers, lawyers, and a team of McKinsey consultants, put its official proposal on the table. When it was Bloom's turn to speak, he casually dismantled the McKinsey case with a rapid succession of questions. How, he wondered, could the owner justify taking the biggest stake in the new company when the union was contributing far more through its wage concessions? "The McKinsey advisers couldn't defend the numbers. Ron showed them they were phony," says Leo Gerard, then the union's district director. "The whole thing collapsed like a house of cards."

Better yet, Bloom and Gerard persuaded the company's owner and creditors that liquidation would be a terrible idea—not least because they could be on the hook for hundreds of millions of dollars in environmental liabilities. "They'd have to pay to leave," says Ken DeLaney, who worked on the deal for the steelworkers. Over the next several weeks, Bloom helped hammer out a counterproposal for an employee buyout, an unprecedented concept in Canada. To give the plan credibility, Bloom and Gerard convinced union members to accept wage cuts that would help keep the company afloat while they negotiated a deal. In the end, Bloom cut Algoma's biggest creditors in for 50 to 60 cents on the dollar and gave them a minority stake in the new firm. The workers would get the rest. As for the owners,

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they *paid* tens of millions of dollars just to wash their hands of the situation.

For Bloom, the Algoma deal yielded two key insights. First, you can typically show that liquidating a company is a lousy deal for everyone involved. Second, once you've convinced stakeholders that they're better off with a living company, labor has enormous leverage. The law technically gives lenders and suppliers priority over workers, but you can usually find new lenders and suppliers. The workers, on the other hand, are virtually irreplaceable. "You may wish there were fewer of them," says Keilin. "You may wish they were paid less. But you can't do it without them." Within a few years, Bloom joined the steelworkers' union full-time.

Inside the Obama administration, March 2009 saw the debate over Chrysler's fate reach a boil. Bloom, barely a month into his tenure on the auto task force, watched with concern as officials at the White House Council of Economic Advisers recommended letting the company collapse to strengthen GM and Ford. Along with Rattner and a White House aide named Brian Deese, Bloom helped convince chief economic adviser Larry Summers and, ultimately, the president that the blow—300,000 lost jobs was the estimate—might be too large for the economy to absorb. "He was very influential because he is someone who has been there in industrial America," says Summers. The government would send cash, but with a caveat: Chrysler had 30 days to restructure and forge an alliance with Fiat. If there was no agreement by then, the administration would cut off funding.

It fell to Rattner and Bloom to broker the deal. Culturally, the two men were near opposites. Rattner had been a trustee of the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Bloom brought his cherished Mr. Potato Head collection to decorate his Treasury office. Bloom also had a reputation in management circles as a gadfly. "There have been a number of cases where company representatives simply refuse to engage him in debate," says Jim Robinson, a former colleague at the United Steelworkers. During one negotiation early this decade, management kept insisting that its accountants wouldn't sign off on a proposal to fund retiree health care. As it happened, the company's accountant—a partner at a major firm—was on-site but not in the room. "Ron kept telling them to bring the partner in so they could debate the issue," recalls Robinson. "But he wouldn't come."

If Bloom made management squirm, he often made his steelworker colleagues uncomfortable, too. He constantly stressed the need to be "commercial," to think about how the company could make a profit. "A lot of times I got advice from Ron I would rather not have heard," says Tom Conway, another steelworker colleague. "But you couldn't kid yourself about what was going on." In the end, it was this single-minded focus on the bottom line that made Rattner and Bloom so compatible.

When it came to the Chrysler deal, the biggest bargaining challenge turned out to be Fiat. Every other party—management, labor, Chrysler's current and former owners, the Canadian and U.S. governments—had something to lose if Chrysler went into liquidation. But Fiat was a "volunteer," as Bloom liked to say. Worse, by announcing that it was either Fiat or bust, the White House had deprived Bloom of what little leverage he might have had.

This wrinkle wasn't lost on the company through the weeks of negotiation that unfolded at Treasury. Its larger-than-life CEO, Sergio Marchionne, was a fiftysomething chain-smoker prone to black sweaters and operatic soliloquies. "He would kind of give us a speech," says one member of the auto task force. " 'I don't need to do this deal, I can go back to [Italy] and have a happy life.' " "Sergio," as nearly everyone called him, had instigated Fiat's remarkable turnaround earlier this decade and wasn't shy about invoking that success. "I'm the man. I fixed Fiat," he would tell the task force, according to this person. "Without me, you're toast." (UAW president Ron Gettelfinger was so put off by Marchionne's antics that Bloom eventually set them up in separate rooms and shuttled back and forth.)

It had dawned on Bloom, however, that the flip side of Marchionne's outsize ego was an outsize sense of pride. Once he'd invested his own credibility, Sergio would be loath to come home empty-handed. "At some point, even though they were a volunteer . . . you get a little deal heat, you get pregnant with the deal," says Matt Feldman, the task force's lead bankruptcy lawyer. "Particularly one playing out in public in an international way."

The final week of negotiations shifted about ten blocks, to the offices of Cadwalader, a large corporate law firm. Bloom, Feldman, and Deese would walk over from Treasury around ten or eleven each morning and convene a meeting involving all the parties to go over unresolved issues. After the meeting, the work would proceed until three or four in the morning. Seventy-two hours out from the deadline, there were basically three sticking points: workers'-compensation liabilities (the state of Michigan covers workers'-comp claims if a company fails, and it wanted Fiat to pick up that liability for Chrysler employees); leftover European inventory from Chrysler's days with Daimler, its former owner (Fiat worried it would crimp future sales); and the amount of money the U.S. government would kick in.

These issues prompted occasional outbursts from Marchionne; Bloom was nearly unflappable. His particular genius is to let an adversary win on an issue, then gradually, subtly reclaim it for his side. So, for example, Fiat might insist that a government loan be forgiven. Bloom would concede it, then offset the loss using the terms of a second loan later on. "Ron has what I refer to as ass power," says Feldman. "He'll continue to talk about things, explore them, work on them, not letting the other side see what's really important to him. Even if it's important, he'll bargain it away early and work on getting it back." In the end, Fiat mostly ate the workers'-comp liabilities; Chrysler and Fiat split the difference on the excess inventory; and Bloom basically held the line on the $8 billion in federal money he'd been authorized to commit.

Bloom's particular genius is to let an adversary appear to win on an issue, then gradually, subtly reclaim it for his side.

Obama formally introduced Bloom as his senior counselor for manufacturing policy at a Labor Day picnic in Cincinnati. "As my new point person on manufacturing, he's going to help us craft the policies that will create the next generation of great manufacturing jobs," the president said.

To succeed, Bloom will have to steer away from the path of Obama's predecessor. It's fair to say that the Bushies were resistant in principle to anything that smacked of industrial policy, the idea that government should play a direct role in nurturing domestic industry. Though they occasionally deviated from it in practice, they subscribed to the standard neoclassical model: that countries will naturally specialize in industries where they have

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a comparative advantage, thanks to certain endowments of labor, capital, and other resources. George W. Bush assumed there was little a government could do to improve on that outcome, exiled his manufacturing czar to the Commerce Department, and, basically, never heard from him. "He mostly ended up speaking at chicken dinners," says Scott Paul of the labor-oriented Alliance for American Manufacturing.

Bloom and the steelworkers, on the other hand, have long been skeptical of this view. They believe it ignores how few countries actually leave it to the market to sort out industrial winners and losers. During the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s, for example, several countries in the region began flooding the United States with exports of commodities like steel. The steelworkers felt the Koreans and Japanese were dumping these goods at below-market prices to stabilize their economies, and they urged Congress and the Clinton administration to stop it. "Philosophically, Ron, myself—no one was against trade. We were against trade that doesn't have rules," says Bill Klinefelter, a former colleague. "We were not going to give away American industries."

An anecdote illustrates the differences in approach. Sixteen years ago, a Ukrainian immigrant named Igor Khandros conjured up an ingenious method for testing semiconductors, until then a labor-intensive process that could only be done cost-effectively offshore. Khandros founded a company called FormFactor in Livermore, California, and attracted some venture capital. By the middle of this decade, the company had hundreds of millions of dollars in sales, a booming export business in Asia, and roughly 1,000 employees, many of whom started at $40,000 plus benefits with only a high school diploma. FormFactor was, in other words, a model for the future of U.S. manufacturing.

But trouble was brewing. A few years earlier, a government-backed company in Korea had hired some of Khandros's engineers and cloned his technology. Soon Khandros noticed that they were vacuuming up his Asian market share. He sued for patent infringement but would eventually lose in the country's Supreme Court. In 2007, he shared the whole sad story with Bush Under Secretary of Commerce Frank Lavin, who was not unsympathetic. But, when Khandros finished, recalls Clyde Prestowitz, a former Reagan Commerce official who has advised FormFactor, Lavin politely asked if he'd thought of opening a plant in … Singapore, This, again, was the *U.S.* Commerce Department. (Lavin stresses that he meant opening a new plant, not relocating.)

If Bloom does nothing more than neutralize the most overt industrial policies of other countries, he will have exceeded expectations. Prestowitz, who is writing a book on the subject, notes that there's a trade agreement currently pending between the United States and Korea. Assuming he's allowed to weigh in, it shouldn't be too hard for a master-leverager like Bloom to persuade the Koreans to play nice.

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For more on the battle to fix our economy, check out Noam Scheiber's **THE STASH** *at www.tnr.com*

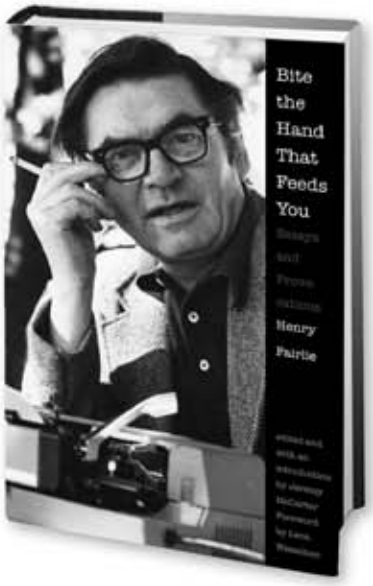
Farther down the list of challenges Bloom will face is green technology. In recent years, politicians have grown fond of suggesting that exporting this equipment might be the solution to our chronic trade deficit. But the Danes are world leaders in the production of wind-energy equipment, the Germans in solar, and the Koreans and Japanese in advanced batteries. The saving grace for U.S. manufacturers is our huge domestic market. But, given the furious competition, even that may be out of reach for them without a major push from the government.

In fact, as of today, we actually run a trade deficit in green technology, thanks in part to the industrial policies of our competitors. One recent controversy involves a $1.5 billion West Texas windfarm project eligible for $450 million in tax credits under the Obama stimulus bill. The companies involved plan to import 240 turbines from China, which is providing financing and would enjoy 85 percent of the job-creation benefits. To boost domestic manufacturers, Bloom could help line up federal loans—say, for an old auto-parts maker looking to produce equipment for wind turbines. (Manufacturers complain that capital for such repurposing is extremely scarce.)

But Bloom's biggest challenge may simply be negotiating the manufacturing czar's status. For example, no one expects him to have much influence over currency policy, even though China's exchange-rate manipulation is arguably as important as any factor in the decline of U.S. manufacturing. Bloom needs "a mandate to accompany the title," says a source close to the White House. "As he sits today, he has himself and a secretary. That's literally it." It doesn't exactly sound promising. Then again, that's a lot more than Bloom had when he first drove down from Pittsburgh. ◆

A New Republic Book

"It would have been nice to have had Henry Fairlie around during the Cheney presidency."
— Tim Heffernan, *Esquire.com*



BITE THE HAND THAT FEEDS YOU
Essays and Provocations
Henry Fairlie
Edited by Jeremy McCarter
Foreword by Leon Wieseltier

"If you doubt that political essays can induce something like ecstasy, I have three names for you. George Orwell, of course. Dwight Macdonald. And Henry Fairlie—who, with this book, may finally get his due."
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"Henry Fairlie was always an inspiration: a rebel, a Tory bohemian, an Oakeshottian, a conversationalist and a merry drunk. He cared more about America than most Americans and wrapped it in a Burkean passion few can equal. This book brings him back to life—and reminds me why we need his like today just as urgently as ever."
—Andrew Sullivan, senior editor, *The Atlantic*

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The Retro Man

John Boehner is tan, rested, and ready—well, tan.

MICHELLE COTTLE

About 20 minutes into my sit-down with House Minority Leader John Boehner, I am overcome by the desire for a drink. Scotch, maybe. Or a bone-dry martini, extra olives. It's not that the Ohio congressman is shaping up to be confrontational or unresponsive or in any way unpleasant. Quite the opposite: Tucked into a corner of the comfy sofa in Boehner's office, watching the dapper, deeply tanned pol pull languidly on a Camel 99 and talk shop in that low, rumbling voice, I feel more like I've wandered into the Shadow bar at Caesars Palace than a formal interview with one of the nation's most powerful Republicans.

Jacketless, kicked back in one of those starchy, wood-and-leather armchairs that populate the Capitol, the 60-year-old Boehner radiates retro cool. His charcoal pin-striped trousers, crisp white shirt, and black tassel loafers are worthy of his inclusion on *Esquire*'s 2007 list of "The Best Dressed Men in the World." A lime-green tie supplies just a dash of flash. Earlier in our talk, the congressman had risen to retrieve a behemoth crystal ashtray from his large, tidy desk, depositing it on the side table between us; now, right arm propped upright on his chair, cigarette burning down toward his neatly manicured fingers, Boehner ponders politics with the wry manner of someone who has seen it all, lived to tell about it, and can't be bothered to get worked up about much these days. His rocky relationship with movement conservatives? Just a matter of style. "It's really interesting," he chuckles. ("Interesting" is a word that tends to pop up when Boehner ventures into ticklish territory.) "Because I'm not harsh, because I'm not a bomb-thrower, people think that I'm not really a conservative." Rumors of competitive friction with his whip, the aggressive, hyper-ambitious Eric Cantor? Stories about their supposed rivalry are "interesting," he says, but there is "no daylight" between them. The campaign drama then unfolding in New York's twenty-third district, where the moderate candidate tapped by local GOP leaders was being pilloried by the base? "It's a mess!" he laughs. "There's no other way to say it."

The longer I luxuriate in the minority leader's soothing aura of smoke and sangfroid, the tougher it becomes to envision the affable, low-key Boehner riding herd on the pack of snarling, hard-right crusaders who increasingly dominate his conference. I am not alone. Despite his conservative voting record and small-government, pro-life sympathies, Boehner has long been viewed with suspicion by the Republican base. This stems in part from his occasional heresies (for instance, his opposition to the tough border-security bill in 2005) but even more so from his basic affability. Boehner comes across as ill-suited for today's brand of abrasive, full-frontal political warfare; he is, many Republicans agree, an anachronism.

And yet, since the early days of the Obama administration, this anachronism and his leadership team have helped a shrunken, depressed minority regain its sass, achieve unity in opposition, exploit Democratic missteps, post wins at the polls in November, and, generally, make trouble for the president. Incongruously, a non-rabid non-crusader brilliantly described by a former GOP leadership aide as "the Dean Martin of Congress" is somehow managing to steer a party overrun by ideologues with pitchforks. Which raises two questions: How exactly has he done it? And—perhaps more *interestingly*—how long before the pitchfork wielders come for him?

To some degree, Boehner's success stems from the fundamental nature of being minority leader. Even he admits that maintaining unity when your party is buckled snugly in the backseat is vastly easier than driving the car. "One of the great shocks of 1994 was—we had won the majority, and no one in our caucus had ever been in the majority—*no one* realized how much more work it is," he stresses, grasping for the appropriate sports metaphor: "You hand the football off to a fullback, and he's gotta *run* with it." By contrast, being in the minority may stink, but it dramatically simplifies the leadership's mission. With Dems in charge, Republicans' primary business is to thwart the will of the majority. And it is far simpler to rally members around "no" than to line them up in support of even the most basic measure.

Still, imposing a modicum of order on Congress's raging egos and ambitions is never easy. And Boehner, by most accounts, has done an admirable job. How? The key to his leadership style, say members of "Boehnerland" (as the congressman has dubbed past and current staffers), lies in his Midwestern, Catholic roots. "The important thing to remember about John is how heavily influenced he was by the large family upbringing," says former spokesman Kevin Madden. One of twelve kids raised in a small house (one bathroom!) on the outskirts of Cincinnati, young John learned early the merits of compromise, conflict management, and everyone pulling their weight. At age ten, he went to work mopping the floors of the family bar, where he honed his listening and people skills. (Is there any better prep for congressional leadership than dealing with ugly drunks?)

Boehner's soothing aura of smoke and sangfroid makes it tough to envision him riding herd on the crusaders who increasingly dominate the House Republican caucus.

Football, too, is a big part of the picture, with Boehner absorbing the go-team gridiron ethos during his days playing center and linebacker at Archbishop Moeller High School. "He always talks about how one of the bigger influences on him was Gerry Faust," recalls Madden, referring to the Notre Dame coach from the early 1980s who launched his career at Moeller. "John always put a priority on teamwork." But Madden's Faust comparison works on another, messier level. Though a legend at Moeller, Faust's tenure at Notre Dame was a flop. In his five seasons, Faust recorded more losses than any of the 23 coaches who came before him. He eventually became a

Eddie Guy

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motivational speaker. "People listen to me because I'm not all about success," he once told *Sports Illustrated*. "They'll listen to someone who failed because most people fail at something in life."

Boehner, too, has been shaped by failure. Elected to the House in 1990, the former plastics salesman came in with some of the same break-the-china tendencies now attributed to up-and-comers like Cantor and Mike Pence. He made an early mark as part of the Gang of Seven, the freshman crusaders who helped expose the House banking and post-office scandals. Catching the eye of Newt Gingrich, Boehner was tapped to head the then–minority whip's Conservative Opportunity Society and, later, to help draw up the Contract with America. Gingrich also asked Boehner to run his campaign for speaker. Boehner, in turn, made a run for conference chairman (deftly eliminating the competition, Louisiana's Bob Livingston, by pledging to back him for chairman of the Appropriations Committee). At the start of his third term, Boehner found himself part of a leadership team—along with Gingrich, Majority Leader Dick Armey, and Whip Tom DeLay—overseeing the first Republican majority in four decades.

But, four years later, Gingrich's self-immolation and the party's electoral losses had the conference demanding a sacrifice. Boehner wound up the goat, losing his post to Oklahoma's J.C. Watts. (His ouster was seen as a victory for DeLay, with whom Boehner often clashed.) It was the sort of repudiation from which few members recover, asserts Minnesota congressman turned lobbyist Vin Weber: "Once someone is viewed as having been knocked off the leadership ladder, they very rarely get back on it."

Boehner, however, immediately began plotting a comeback, directing his then–chief of staff to outline a route back onto the ladder. "I decided I was gonna earn my way back," he tells me. "I wasn't gonna *talk* my way back. I was just gonna go back to my committees … and I was just gonna let my work speak for itself." He also vowed not to let the bastards see him sweat. "I was never gonna let anyone see one ounce of disappointment on my face—not one ounce of regret," he stresses. "I was never gonna drop my head." He lets out a rueful chuckle. "Now, there were some times when on the inside there was"—he pauses—"more disappointment and turmoil than you could ever imagine. But I was never gonna let anybody see it on my face."

In 2001, Boehner became chairman of the House education committee, just in time to take charge of President George W. Bush's signature education initiative. Along the way, he evolved into a savvy legislator and developed a good rapport with Democrats such as George Miller (the committee's ranking Dem) and Senator Ted Kennedy. (For years, Kennedy and Boehner co-hosted an annual charity dinner to aid Catholic schools in some of Washington's poorest neighborhoods.) By early 2006, Boehner had rebuilt his reputation, and the ladder was once again in his sights. As scandals began picking off colleagues, he made his move, entering the race to succeed the embattled DeLay as majority leader. Brandishing his Gang of Seven credentials and his status as the rare member never to have requested an earmark, Boehner ran as a reformer. This elicited jeers from Dems and other critics, who pointed to Boehner's enduring love affair with lobbyists. Over the years, Boehner has been criticized for holding a weekly schmooze session with his favored lobbyists, known as the "Thursday Group"; for his love of corporate-jet travel (often to sunny golf destinations); for renting an apartment from a lobbyist whose clients had business before his committee; and, most notoriously, for (literally) handing out checks from Big Tobacco on the House floor as members were preparing to vote on tobacco legislation in 1995. No matter. Republicans were desperate for even the faintest promise of redemption. With his reassuring manner and detailed PowerPoint presentations, Boehner seemed as good a bet as any.

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For additional political coverage by Michelle Cottle and other TNR editors, visit
THE PLANK
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It didn't hurt, of course, that Boehner had been around the House long enough to learn the pressure points of the institution. "A lot of outside observers assume that leadership campaigns are exposed to the same elements that an electoral campaign has," explains Madden. "But it's really done inside a vacuum" with a relatively small number of votes to court. "It's a chit-counting game within that group," he adds. "John always understood that." Boehner's focus on the fundamentals—working his friendships and keeping close tabs on the vote count—enabled him to beat out interim leader Roy Blunt. On February 2, 2006, Boehner's vindication became official.

Alas, nine months later, Republicans were bounced back into the minority and Boehner out of his hard-won title. Unbowed, he made a play for minority leader. He faced feistier combatants (chiefly Indiana's Mike Pence) more in tune with the zeitgeist. But, in a conference scarred by years of scandal and leadership turmoil, Boehner's laid-back steadiness again carried the day. He also benefitted from being something of a Goldilocks choice: "He's conservative enough to please the conservatives," explains John Feehery, a onetime aide to former House Speaker Dennis Hastert. "But he's got a presentation that is not in your face." Similarly, Boehner was new enough to leadership not to be tarred by its failures, but he was also one of the few members with leadership experience—as well as firsthand knowledge of how to win the majority. "In one sense, he was the last real link to the [Gingrich] revolution," says Feehery. "They needed someone who actually knows where the bodies are buried." And, of course, Boehner tended his inside game. "He arranged the steering committee that selects chairmanships and committees to his liking. He was very good at stacking that," says the somewhat-critical ex-leadership aide. "He put his ally [Pete Sessions] over at the NRCC. … He put up a number of firewalls around him to protect himself with loyal allies."

Even so, it was a bumpy adjustment. Movement conservatives have long questioned whether Boehner shares all of their priorities. Among other sins, he opposed a 2002 bill aimed at allowing churches to engage in politicking without losing their tax-exempt status and (less successfully) fought against 2005 legislation imposing sanctions on anyone selling weapons to China. During the '06 leadership race, the right-wing publication *Human Events* compiled a list of "John Boehner's Top 10 Worst Votes."

The strain was exacerbated by Boehner's need to work with the Democratic majority and a politically toxic President Bush to address the imploding economy. "It was the Texas two-step every day. It really was!" laughs Boehner. Navigating the conflicting demands of his conference and of his party's president became an exercise in frustration, especially on the bank bailout. During the initial floor vote, Boehner was hung out to dry when his conference torpedoed the TARP bill despite his pleadings. Recalls one Democratic aide, "He would say things, and we'd agree to do something, but his people didn't back him up." These days, Boehner is clearly delighted to have traded in that complicated, ulcer-inducing dynamic for a Democratic regime he can freely knock around. "Aw, no, this is very different, *very* different," he says, deep oceans of relief filling his voice.

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Despite the GOP's slide further into the minority in 2008, Boehner held onto the leadership, for many of the same comforting reasons he won it originally. It also helped that he lacked a serious challenger—a situation that the savvy organization man did not leave to chance. Pence, deemed one of the most dangerous threats to the throne, was rendered harmless when Boehner backed him to unseat the incumbent conference chair. This ensured that Pence stayed out of the running for Boehner's job and also, says Feehery, "took care of the bloodletting the conference needed" (an impulse with which Boehner is excruciatingly familiar). Meanwhile, Deputy Whip Cantor opted to bide his time, settling for a promotion to chief whip. Observes Thomas Mann, a congressional scholar at the Brookings Institution, "Basically, Boehner just maneuvered as quickly as he could to accommodate those who were his likely successors."

The same solid, old-fashioned traits that aided Boehner's rise have their advantages now that he's at the top. Hill veterans note that, in his role as party ambassador, Boehner can campaign even in moderate strongholds and go on television to criticize the president without sounding scary. "I think conservatives realize that Boehner has his uses," says Feehery. Internally, the Mr. Congeniality rep has managerial value. "Congress is a high school," says the ex-leadership aide. "To be popular among colleagues can help you out in tough situations." It can also help you play the heavy without looking like one. "When you crack down on somebody, everybody realizes they deserve it."

And make no mistake, one of the leader's less-recognized talents is his ability to play hardball without looking nasty. Boehner has always had a touch of the enforcer to him. As Gingrich's conference chairman during the Hillarycare skirmishes, he played the role of bad cop, seeing to it that members and outside groups alike toed the line. As leader, Boehner is equally willing to use the stick on his own people when they turn obdurate. "Look what he did to Flake," notes the ex-leadership aide, referring to how Arizona's Jeff Flake, mouthing off once too often about his Republican colleagues' taste for pork, found himself stripped of his seat on the Judiciary Committee. Flake isn't an isolated case. Just three months after becoming majority leader in 2006, Boehner warned members in a closed-door meeting that those who opposed his budget resolution could kiss their prime committee assignments goodbye; he even singled out Democrat-turned-Republican Walter B. Jones as someone who needed to be "talked to" by colleagues. In 2008, after several Republicans opposed a resolution aimed at embarrassing New York Democrat Charlie Rangel over his ethics troubles, Boehner threatened to monkey with the committee assignments of anyone who bucked him in the next go-around. The leader knows how to twist arms, say Hill vets, he just manages not to look like he enjoys it too much.

Meanwhile, Boehner's empower-the-team philosophy allows him to channel all that twitchy energy among his deputies. The leadership has developed its own good-cop, bad-cop routine that has proved effective during tricky votes, such as the January stimulus debate. Boehner's push for unanimous conference opposition promised problems back home for some members, including freshman moderate Joseph Cao, who scored an upset last year in Louisiana's overwhelmingly Democratic second district by ousting William "busted with bribe money in his freezer" Jefferson. Cao's district contains most of New Orleans, whose Katrina-bruised residents had their eye on the Recovery Act's infrastructure money, and the congressman had made it clear that he was inclined to support the bill. But, as the vote neared, Cantor and Pence ratcheted up the pressure, ultimately standing near Cao on the floor throughout the voting. In the end, Cao voted no. Two days later, Boehner's leadership PAC swept in with a $5,000 injection to the freshman's meager campaign coffers.

But, for all his unlikely success, Boehner lives with constant chatter about which of his more strident rivals will eventually stick a knife in his back. Increasingly, the prime suspect is Cantor. Just this month, *GQ* ranked the hard-charging whip twenty-third on its 2009 list of the "50 Most Powerful People in D.C." Boehner did not make the cut. (Asked about the list by *Politico*, Boehner made a joke about his own best-dressed credentials.) Boehner's number two is clearly more in step with the current preference for sharp partisan jabs delivered in Web-friendly nuggets. "Boehner is a go-along-to-get-along leader," says the ex-leadership aide. "He's very chummy. He has to really push himself to really become adversarial. Eric Cantor, by nature, is much more aggressive." Madden puts it this way: "One's old school, and one's new school."

Under constant pressure from his right flank, Boehner has been working to turn up the volume. He seized on Speaker Pelosi's impolitic accusation that the CIA lied to Congress in the run-up to the Iraq war, and he has kept up a steady stream of public condemnations of Rangel. Response from the right has been positive. Of the Pelosi dust-up, one usually critical member told *Roll Call* it was nice to "see a leader lead."

Still, talking with Republicans about Boehner, you often detect a note of sadness—perhaps even pity—for a man no longer of the times. Gone are the days when Boehner would hang out in the Speaker's Lobby smoking and schmoozing with reporters, who enjoyed his chattiness and wry asides. Today's press is made for those like Cantor, whose operation, as one former GOP staffer puts it, "is built for speed and precision." "John looks at ways to advance things methodically. I think that it's probably an unappreciated attribute," says Madden. "Often times, in the cable-news culture and online new-media culture that reward volume, he may not gain as much admiration on that level as he should."

"Boehner is a go-along-to-get-along leader," says a former leadership aide. "He's very chummy. He has to really push himself to really become adversarial."

Ultimately, Boehner's future rests on the party's performance in the midterm elections. As judgment day draws closer, his team will be under pressure to shed the GOP's "Party of No" label and put forth a cohesive vision of government. That, say Hill watchers, will pose a much tougher test of Boehner's leadership skills. "Do we need one firebrand ideologue spokesman—a visionary like Gingrich in '94—with the personality and the profile to lead the entire rebellion? Or is this going to be done by having a salesman and engineer work on the infrastructure and foundation to methodically build a winning coalition of voters to help us try and at least get back the House in 2010 or 2012?" asks Madden. "That's the debate right now." It's no secret which of these paths leaves room for John Boehner. ◆

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The Great Satan Myth

Everything you know about U.S. involvement in Iran is wrong.

ABBAS MILANI

The Iranian regime has never found itself more vulnerable. And, with this vulnerability, it has never leaned more heavily on its own narrative of history. This narrative, of course, has a central antagonist, a character conjured as the "Great Satan." As this Koranic moniker implies, the Islamic Republic ascribes supernatural qualities to its adversary: From far away in Washington, D.C., the Great Satan has the power to send hordes of stooges to shout in the streets and the remarkable ability to manufacture every ill in Iranian society.

The power of this narrative is that it goes beyond these mythological qualities to muster the stuff of history. It was the CIA, the story goes, that deposed a democratically elected Iranian leader back in 1953, and then spent 26 years propping up a despotic Shah while he mercilessly abused his people.

As Iranians protested the sham election last summer, the regime wielded this narrative to bolster itself. Its opponents were denounced as puppets of the very meddlers who had done so much harm to the country over the past century. Ayatollah Khamenei rehashed this history in a November 3 speech, describing how the United States "embarked on hatching plots against the nation from the very early days."

This is a seductive narrative, but what's strange is the group that it has seduced: the very meddlers themselves in Washington. As the regime has teetered these past months, many in the United States (and especially at the highest rungs of government) have held their tongues. There has been a reluctance to voice solidarity with the green movement or to loudly protest regime abuses, for fear that any criticism from the United States will be perceived as the latest installment in this history. Obama, for his part, has voiced his support for the protestors in passive language. "The world continues to bear witness to their powerful calls for justice" is his strange formulation—a description that places the United States in the role of bystander.

There are, arguably, strategic reasons for the United States to keep silent on the fate of the democratic movement. But history is not one of them. Rather, the regime's version of events (past and present) is self-serving and, at critical junctures, altogether baseless. Documents (some recently declassified) from various U.S. archives show a rather different version of foreign policy toward Iran. The Shah may have been a U.S. ally in the cold war, but the relationship was fraught. Behind closed doors, the United States pushed hard for the country to democratize. During the periods when the United States failed to stand on the side of the Iranian people, it paid a horrible price. It is worth revisiting this history, not simply because it debunks the Manichaean theory of the past touted by the mullahs, but also because it contains important lessons for how the United States can navigate the current crisis in Iran.

The U.S. relationship with the Shah was fraught.

BETTMANN/CORBIS

If there's one event that has come to define perceptions of U.S. meddling, it is the coup that ejected the popularly elected Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh from power in 1953. Both Madeleine Albright and Barack Obama have acknowledged America's role in the coup in speeches that were widely taken to be apologies.

In no small measure, the American understanding of the event derives from a 1979 memoir published by Kermit Roosevelt Jr., Theodore's grandson. Roosevelt, a CIA operative, had indeed slipped across the border and spent considerable sums on black propaganda intended to inflict mortal wounds against Mossadegh. But Roosevelt's memoir inflated his own and, in turn, America's centrality to the coup. He tells the story with the relish of a John le Carré knock-off. Although declassified CIA documents would later confirm many details of his account, his version is exceptionally self-serving. Despite having little knowledge of Iranian society and speaking no Persian, he describes launching an instantly potent propaganda campaign. Eisenhower, for one, considered reports like this to be the stuff of "dime novels."

The Roosevelt book, however, has an enduring legacy. It depicts the coup as an American and British concoction and inadvertently absolves Mossadegh of his many missteps. But the backstory of his fall is far more complicated. Mossadegh had initially seen the Americans as his staunch ally. And the United States reciprocated this warmth. It was Franklin Delano Roosevelt who first paid attention to events in Iran. During World War II, American soldiers were stationed in Iran to

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manage the transnational railroad, an essential supply line for the badly bruised Red Army. And, as Roosevelt departed from the 1943 Tehran Conference with Stalin and Churchill, he met at the airport with his envoy, General Patrick Hurley, and formulated a new Iran policy. Its primary goals included promoting democracy and ridding Iran of colonial forces. In rhetoric that might now be tainted as neoconservative, the policy clearly aimed to transform Iran into a showcase of democracy and the vanguard of the decolonized Middle East. As Hurley later distilled the new policy, "[Iran] can achieve for herself the fulfillment of the principles of justice, freedom of conscience, freedom of press, freedom of speech, freedom of want, equality and opportunity, and to a degree, freedom from fear."

Mossadegh seemed to represent the promise of post-colonial Iran. Even as ardent a proponent of Pax Americana as Henry Luce felt comfortable making him *Time*'s "Man of the Year." But the idea of supporting a post-colonial democrat necessarily put the United States on a collision course with its allies. Winston Churchill despised Mossadegh for nationalizing Iran's oil fields and refineries, which the British considered their rightful heirlooms. Back in London, the Brits mulled plans to seize those assets back militarily. For nearly two years, the Truman administration, particularly the diplomat Averell Harriman, worked furiously to broker a solution to this standoff. And, even though those efforts failed, they did prevent a British attack. The British grew so frustrated by the U.S. efforts to fashion a compromise that, according to documents in their archives, they came to believe that the United States was dealing with Mossadegh behind their backs.

None of these subtleties, of course, ever merits a mention in the regime's version of events. Nor do the clerics mention a detail that grows richer in irony with each apology by an American politician. It was the clerical establishment's animosity towards Mossadegh that laid the groundwork for his ouster. A broad swath of clerics—Islamists like Ayatollah Abolgasem Kashani, a mentor of the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini—had initially supported Mossadegh. But, by late 1952, the clerics turned against him after he bucked their demands. The Ayatollah Kashani unsuccessfully pressed Mossadegh for the right to appoint key ministers. Another top cleric called on the prime minister to purge the civil service of Baha'is—a bane of Shia clergy. The clergy's allegiance to Mossadegh weakened further as he allowed the communist Tudeh Party to gain ever more power, despite his own personal abhorrence of communism. Once Mossadegh squandered the allegiance of the clergy, the inevitability of his fate became increasingly clear. (He had also alienated the middle class, increasingly weary of ideological warfare; and the army had pleaded for his ouster.)

None of this is to defend America's role in the coup. But it was hardly the only or even the decisive factor in his fall. Indeed, in the most obvious instance of its meddling in Iranian history, the United States actually meddled on the side of the very religious establishment that now complains so bitterly about the Great Satan.

The history of U.S. involvement in the country doesn't make for a simple tale. On the one hand, the United States supported the Shah and helped him consolidate his regime. On the other hand, the United States quietly and persistently attempted to prod the Shah toward a more democratic system. The Americans helped the Shah create his dreaded secret police, the SAVAK, in 1957—and then, the next year, attempted to roll back his move toward authoritarianism. For the United States, these two objectives were not contradictory. Both the CIA and the State Department, which clearly preferred the Shah to any alternative, openly worried that the country would succumb to revolution absent substantial steps toward democracy.

This analysis, however, produced a state of constant tension between the Shah and the United States. During his weakest moments—particularly in the late 1950s and early '60s—the Shah would nod his head in agreement when the Americans extolled democratization. For example, in 1958, the U.S. ambassador told the Shah he had to engage in preventive measures such as an anti-corruption campaign and "fireside chats" with the people of Iran. Not long after, a new anti-corruption law was passed and the Shah gave his first public press conference. But the Shah never made these gestures with any conviction. Social change, he believed, could only be imposed with an iron fist. When the Americans would make their demands, he had an array of tricks to change the subject. The Shah would invariably insist that the pressure to democratize would merely empower the communists. Moreover, the anti-corruption law soon faded from memory and was used only to settle grudges.

The Americans grew increasingly frustrated with his authoritarianism. When the Shah faced a military coup in 1958, the United States essentially gave it tacit assent. It did nothing to relay word of General Valiollah Qarani's plot to the Shah. Indeed, the CIA station in Tehran arranged for the publication of anti-regime propaganda in the Iranian press—and then let the Shah know that the agency had planted the material there to highlight its wavering allegiance. As CIA Director Allen Dulles told a meeting of the National Security Council in 1958, "We still take a gloomy view of the Shah's future unless he can be persuaded to undertake some dramatic reforms."

The tension between the Americans and the Shah reached a crescendo during the Kennedy years, when the administration based its Iran policy on the views of, among others, Supreme Court Justice William Douglas. Based on his travels in Iran, Douglas concluded that the Shah was an incorrigible despot and advocated ramping up the push toward democracy. (Bobby Kennedy also shared an aversion to the Shah.) An administration task force considered the fragile state of the Shah and questioned the very rationale of the relationship. This was, after all, the era of the Alliance for Progress and the Peace Corps. The administration had less patience for undemocratic allies. But the task force concluded that the strategic costs of abandonment were too great. Instead, President Kennedy focused on redoubling the Eisenhower efforts to reform the regime.

Fortunately for Kennedy, he had the perfect vessel for this approach—the reformist Prime Minister Ali Amini. Together, the Americans and Amini convinced the Shah to attempt a breathtaking transformation of Iran, including suffrage for women, land reform, and a reduction of the military budget. It envisioned a new class of technocrats to steward a modernized bureaucracy. (Eventually, the Shah convinced the Americans that he, better than any prime minister, could bring about these reforms.)

As the Shah set out to implement these ambitious changes—the "White Revolution"—he came into conflict with the Ayatollah Khomeini and his cohorts. The mullahs considered women's suffrage the first step toward harlotry and land reform a transgression against Islam's belief in the sanctity of private property. The mullahs denounced these changes as "dishonest slogans that will bring nothing short of corruption, prostitution, and other miseries."

But, to a large extent, the White Revolution was a success. The Iranian economy transcended its semi-feudal state and grew rapidly. Women entered the

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political domain and workforce, and even the SAVAK suspended its program of torture and generally liberalized.

The greatest sources of Islamist ire—the empowerment of women and other trappings of modernity—were hardly issues that could unite a broad coalition, especially one that included communists and discontented swaths of the middle class. Instead, Khomeini and his followers attempted to cloak themselves in the language of the left, or at least provide the language of the left with a Shia gloss. The Islamists translated classic concepts from Marxism into their own discourse: The "proletariat" became the "Mostaz'af" (the weakened), the "bourgeois" became "Tagut" (rebels against God), and "imperialism" became "Estekbar" (arrogance).

For all its work pushing the Shah in the direction of democracy, the United States also did its part to inadvertently abet his opponents. In 1964, the Pentagon pushed the Shah to sign a basing agreement that would have offered Americans in Iran diplomatic immunity from prosecution. For a century, Iran had been a battleground for the Great Powers—and this agreement reeked of colonialism. The fact that the Shah accepted this agreement allowed the Islamists to turn it into a rallying cry.

Richard Nixon provided another impetus for revolution. He ostentatiously stopped pressuring the Shah to move toward democracy. To be sure, this pressure had only limited effects under previous administrations. It certainly didn't result in a European-style constitutional monarchy. But it improved conditions on the margins—and, to some extent, checked the Shah's authoritarian instincts. Nixon and Kissinger, however, didn't place much of a premium on such mushy values. And they had concluded that the Shah was now in full control of the country. Therefore, it was unnecessary to worry about revolutionary challenges. So U.S. intelligence scaled back its Iran reporting to World War II–era levels. And the Americans ended their contacts with the opposition. Perhaps this is why the CIA was so completely blindsided by the events of 1979.

Absent U.S. pressure, the Shah entered a new monomaniacal phase. Flush with cash from the oil-price spike of the early 1970s, he went on what the CIA called a "lending binge." He gave money to nearly anyone who asked, including Western countries that had once assisted Iran. The Shah often described democracy as more befitting the "blue-eyed world." Now, he acted on those sentiments. In 1975, he declared—by royal fiat—that Iran would become a one-party state, replete with pseudo-fascist trappings. The rise of an urban guerrilla movement against the Shah created an atmosphere that spurred the SAVAK to unleash a wave of censorship in society and torture in prisons.

Iran's own mullahs desperately wanted the ouster of Mohammed Mossadegh.

This authoritarianism, of course, sparked widespread discontent. By the time that Iran had boiled into a revolutionary state, in the winter of 1978, Jimmy Carter commissioned the old State Department hand George Ball, who had traveled to Iran a half dozen times, to present an independent assessment of the country's situation. The Nixon Doctrine, he concluded, had created disastrous conditions. Only a rapid move to democracy could avert a crisis. Yet Ball saw few candidates who could usher in this change. The United States used its considerable influence with the Iranian armed forces to dissuade coup plotters. But these efforts, made behind closed doors, did nothing to change the climate—and, certainly, nothing to diminish the anti-Americanism that ultimately resulted in the siege and occupation of the U.S. Embassy.

IN OTHER words, the actual history of U.S. involvement in Iran is far more complicated than the mullahs present—and most Americans realize. It wasn't an unambiguous cold war travesty, like Vietnam. For much of the era, the United States supported the cause of Iranian democracy. And, when it failed to push the Shah in that direction, it suffered.

Will the United States stand on the side of Iranian democracy now? The worry one hears most often in Washington is that such a stand will backfire; it will bolster the mullahs by annoying the innate nationalism of the Iranian people. But this misunderstands the regime. No matter what the United States does—even if it maintains a studied silence—the regime will describe its opponents as U.S. tools. This accusation is a political necessity for the mullahs and deeply embedded in their worldview. Besides, no matter how much the regime denounces the Great Satan, Iranians, on the whole, remain positively disposed to the United States, at least relative to the rest of the Muslim world.

This doesn't mean that Obama should abandon the idea of engagement. Iranian democrats have long supported this policy. But they have also worried about it being badly implemented. Negotiations with the clerics that ignore human rights and democracy are indeed a form of appeasement. When the Obama administration speaks to the mullahs about nuclear weapons, it must bring these concerns to the fore—just as the Reagan administration did in its later dealings with the Soviets. It can use these meetings to send a profoundly inspiring message of support to Iranian democrats. In the end, these Iranians are the international community's best hope for solving the current nuclear impasse.

But, whatever policy the Obama administration adopts, it must not let a tendentious narrative of history tie its hands. The past must not weigh the United States down with guilt. Rather, it should provide an object lesson of the cost incurred when it fails to stand on the side of democracy. ◆

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The Detroit Project

A plan for solving America's greatest urban disaster.

BRUCE KATZ AND JENNIFER BRADLEY

For much of the United States, Detroit has become shorthand for failure—not just because of the dilapidation of the town's iconic industry, but because the entire metropolis seems like a dystopian disaster. It is the second-most-segregated metropolitan area in the country; the city's population is 82 percent African American. No other American city has shed more people since 1950—Detroit is only half its former size. Its city government fails at the most basic tasks. A call to 911 will bring a response, on average, in about 20 minutes. (Such emergency calls are depressingly common in the metropolitan area: There are 1,220 violent crimes per 100,000 people.) And that's to say nothing of corruption in the municipal ranks. This year alone, at least 48 Detroit public-school employees have been investigated for fraud—which might help explain why only one in four high school freshmen ever receives a diploma. Unemployment in Detroit stands at a staggering 28 percent. And, in key measures of economic vitality in the nation's 100 largest metropolitan regions, Detroit finishes dead last.

All this might make Detroit seem like the most hopeless case in the global history of the city. But it is hardly the worst and certainly not hopeless. Europe is filled with cities that have risen from similarly miserable conditions.

Take Belfast, which suffered not only industrial decline and disinvestment, but also paralyzing religious guerrilla warfare. Although it received the same sort of hammer blow from globalization as Detroit, it now has steady job growth after decades of losses. Its economic output leapt 35 percent per capita between 2000 and 2005. And, throughout the European continent's industrial belt—the parts that are distinctly not Disneyland for American yuppies—there are many other examples of old redoubts of manufacturing (Bilbao, Leipzig, Sheffield, St. Étienne) that have enjoyed the very same sort of dramatic recoveries. This is not to oversell the optimism that these cities

Europe is filled with cities that have recovered from the sort of depression and destruction that now curse Detroit.

J. HEROUN

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should inspire. They will never recover their full manufacturing might or swell with quite so many residents as before. Still, they represent realistic models for the rescue of Detroit.

It is strangely fitting that the recent auto bailout endowed Detroit with a new corporate patron hailing from Turin, Italy. Like Detroit, Turin was once a grand capital of the auto industry, which accounted for 80 percent of the city's industrial activity, most of it with Fiat, Chrysler's new owner. But the Italian auto industry didn't fare much better than the American one in the face of new competition. Fiat's Turin operations went from 140,000 workers in the early 1970s to a mere 40,000 in the early '90s. And with the collapse of Fiat came the collapse of Turin. Its population plummeted almost 30 percent in 25 years. National and local leaders focused more on combating domestic terrorism from the Red Brigades than on providing basic services. The city spun through four mayors in seven years and accumulated a budget deficit in the mid-'90s of 120 billion lira.

Recovery from this kind of spiral begins with political leadership. And, in 1993, the city elected a reformist mayor, Valentino Castellani, who devised a breathtakingly ambitious plan for the city. Potential investors were never going to have faith in Turin unless the city spelled out its strategy with specificity, so the plan laid out 84 "actions" for development, which Turin vowed to implement by the year 2011. Despite its gritty condition, the city promised to develop a tourism industry and the transportation network to support it. It used its own funds, plus money from national, regional, and provincial governments and private companies, to create a range of institutions—business incubators, foundations, research laboratories, venture-capital funds, and technology parks—that would promote its information-technology and green-energy industries. Other efforts built on Turin's historical strengths. Turin may no longer have had cheap industrial labor, but it still possessed people with a deep understanding of production and design. They simply needed new outlets and markets for their core competencies.

Turin's plan worked. By 2006, it posted its lowest levels of unemployment ever and its highest levels of economic activity in half a century. The city reinvented itself as a center for design, not just of cars, but also for aerospace, cinematography, and textiles. Plenty of parts suppliers still depend on business from Fiat, but they have also found new customers in China and other growing markets. Physical regeneration accompanied the economic recovery. The city submerged the old central railway line that had bifurcated the town, transforming that route into a boulevard that serves as Turin's new backbone. What Turin shows is that even a decaying industrial base can be the foundation for a new economy. That is, the industry may fade, but expertise doesn't. Detroit's American cousins, Akron and Toledo, have already shown how specialties developed for car manufacturing can be repurposed. As Akron's tire-making industry declined, companies, working with local universities, shifted their focus and research efforts into the related business of polymers. The former Rubber Capital of the World now makes polymers and plastics that can be used in clean energy and biotech. Or take Toledo, which long specialized in building windows and windshields for cars. One industry leader, known locally as "the glass genius," started tinkering with solar cells in the 1980s. The University of Toledo showed an interest in his work, and the state gave the school and two companies some money to investigate photovoltaic technology. That spurred other business and university collaborations, which drew more infusions of state economic development funds, and the region now has some 5,000 jobs in the solar industry.

Institutions developed at the height of Detroit's postwar prosperity remain—and provide the city with advantages that similarly depressed industrial cities cannot claim. It has educational institutions in or near the city (the University of Michigan, Wayne State) and medical institutions (in part, a legacy of all those union health care plans) that are innovative powerhouses and that currently generate private-sector activity in biomedicine, information technology, and health care management. And there is already a smattering of examples of old industrial outposts that have reacquired relevance. An old GM plant in Wixom has been retrofitted to produce advanced batteries. There's a new automotive-design lab based in Ann Arbor. And Ford, the most promising of the Big Three, has made a decisive shift toward smaller, cleaner cars.

Retooling Detroit's old industries and advancing its new ones will take public money, and the feds are the only ones with money to give these days. But Washington already spends heavily on Detroit—$18.4 billion went to the city and the surrounding county in 2008. This money, however, isn't invested with any broader purpose, a sense of how all this spending can add up to something grander. A better return on federal investments will take a functioning local government as well as leadership in suburban counties that is willing to collaborate closely with the city. And, with so much sclerosis, change will only emerge with a strong hand from above. State and federal governments should place the city's most dysfunctional agencies in receivership as a quid pro quo for federal investment—a milder version of the federal takeover of Washington, D.C., in the 1990s. These higher-level governments should also insist that the city and its suburbs end their wasteful bickering and act as one on issues that naturally cross borders, like transportation and the environment. The region's elected officials should be strongly encouraged to replicate the metropolitan mayors' caucuses in Chicago and Denver, or a strong metropolitan transportation and land-use agency, as in Portland or Minneapolis. Business will never have faith in Detroit with local government in its current condition and with the metropolis so riven by old city-suburb divisions.

Locals compare Detroit to Dresden. Nearly one-third of the land in the city is unused, and some 80,000 homes are vacant. Detroit will have to be dramatically reconfigured.

The point of Turin is that dramatic reform in local and metropolitan governance, coupled with strategic interventions from above, catalyzes market revival. Turin reoriented manufacturing with smart, subtle, and relatively minimal government interventions. And there are plenty of opportunities like this in Detroit. The metropolitan region is packed with companies that supplied parts to the Big Three. Because of the current credit desert, these companies should receive low-interest loans that allow them to reconfigure their plants to produce parts that can be sold to the international auto market—or for other types of machinery. And local government (or NGOs, even) can play the role of industrial planner. That is, they can look across the map

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and find instances where research institutions and manufacturers should collaborate on new ventures.

Even if Detroit were to rebuild its economy, it would still face a fundamental obstacle to recovery. It is just too big for itself, with a landscape that even locals compare to postwar Dresden. Nearly one-third of the land in the city is empty or unused, and some 80,000 city homes are vacant. European cities faced a similar challenge. After decades of population and job loss, they were saddled with an excess of housing and too much unproductive, polluted, or vacant land. This derelict land was as much an economic problem as a physical one, depressing property values and repelling new investments. So these cities reconfigured themselves into denser communities, recycling polluted industrial lands, laying down new rail and transit infrastructure, and investing in projects that created demand not only for particular parcels, but also for the wider urban area.

This physical regeneration, much more than economic reorientation, is where governments have a major role. The great object lesson is Bilbao, Spain. As in Turin, leaders—in this case, the Basque regional government, worried about the condition of its largest city—created a master plan and two public-private agencies to support it, one of which, Bilbao Ria, focused specifically on managing large-scale land-cleanup-and-revitalization projects. The master plan identified four swaths of the city for targeted reinvention, including a major parcel of riverfront land, which was cut off from the central city by unused shipping and transportation infrastructure.

Bilbao Ria spent 184 million euros on site cleanup; the provincial and regional governments kicked in 144 million euros—the full cost—for the Frank Gehry–designed Guggenheim museum. But the city also created a new metro system and a tram line for the revitalized waterfront. Airports, ports, and regional train systems were also modernized. And, critically, the city spent two decades and one billion euros (mostly from higher levels of government) on a new water-sanitation system to keep untreated household and industrial waste out of the river, which would make waterfront development possible.

Detroit has to change physically because it simply cannot sustain its current form. It was built for two million people, not the 900,000 that live there today. Manhattan, San Francisco, and Boston could all fit within Detroit's 139-square-mile boundary, and there would still be 20 square miles to spare. Even more than its European counterparts, which had much less severe population losses, Detroit will have to become a different kind of city, one that challenges our idea of what a city is supposed to look like, and what happens within its boundaries. The new Detroit might be a patchwork of newly dense neighborhoods, large and small urban gardens, art installations, and old factories transformed into adventure parks. The new Detroit could have a park, much like Washington's Rock Creek Park, centered around a creek on its western edge, and a system of canals from the eastern corner of the city to Belle Isle in the south. The city has already started on the restoration of the Detroit River waterfront, largely bankrolled by private philanthropy. The city has created a new "land bank," which can take control of vacant and derelict properties and start the process of clearing land, remediating environmental contamination, and figuring out what to do next with the parcel, whether that's making it into a small park, deeding it to a neighbor to create a well-tended yard, or assembling large tracts of land for redevelopment or permanent green space. There are plans for a new transit line along Woodward Corridor, which, if coupled with smart land use and zoning changes, could spark an entirely different pattern of development. Expanded commuter-rail service to Ann Arbor is in the works, and the Obama administration is weighing a high-speed-rail plan that would link Detroit to Chicago and other Midwestern cities.

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Like a neglected brownstone or a ramshackle Victorian, Detroit has good bones. Already, the city is attracting social entrepreneurs who are excited by the challenge of fundamentally remaking a city. Philanthropies are pouring in money and imagination—the rail system on the Woodward Corridor is partially funded by tens of millions of dollars from two major foundations, and other philanthropies are trying to develop a comprehensive educational plan.

The federal government could support the physical regeneration of Detroit by footing the bill for the development of a new city plan focused on reconfiguring land uses and economic activity around the reality of population loss. More radically, the feds could overhaul that tired cliché of urban policy: the community-development block grant. They should require Detroit and other cities to use these grants (and other federal, state, and local resources) for reclaiming, reconfiguring, and reusing vacant and abandoned land and housing. The federal government could make Detroit a pilot city for land recycling and demolition projects. Scores of other industrial cities have too much land and outdated infrastructure. The foreclosure-smacked boomtowns of the sunbelt are also grappling with their own version of this legacy of excess.

European leaders understood that recovery requires at least a generation. This is a tough realization in places that are not just in economic decline, but are often caught in a kind of mass state of depression. Detroit's leaders must manage expectations. It took half a century for the city to get this low. It won't turn around in a four-year political cycle. Turin's revival started with the mayoral election of 1993; Bilbao's physical transformation began in 1990. And both cities are still in the process of recovery. The policies that salvaged these cities are perfectly compatible with the American grain of politics—but the patience required for their success is not.

Washington has already bailed out Detroit—at least, the companies that once turned the city into the quintessential American metropolis of the industrial age. When the government justified injecting money into the firms, it made an implicit argument about the country—that these companies are essential to our future economic greatness, that their loss would be an unbearable symbolic defeat. The same holds for the city that houses them. Even after losing one million people, Detroit is still the eleventh-largest city in the country and, before the auto crisis, it was the source of more than half of Michigan's GDP. To allow Detroit to continue its march toward death would come at significant costs, both human and economic. For Detroit to die, especially in the face of such tested methods for saving cities, would be an American tragedy. ◆

Bruce Katz is director of the Metropolitan Policy Program at the Brookings Institution. Jennifer Bradley is a senior research associate with the Metropolitan Policy Program. This essay draws on research undertaken by Brookings and the London School of Economics for a joint project on older industrial cities.

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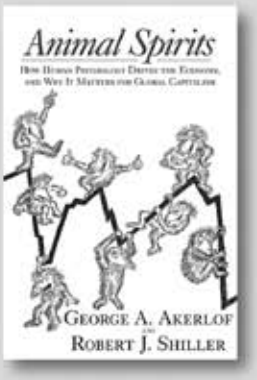

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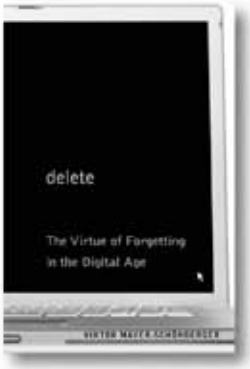

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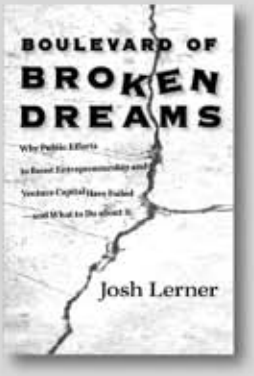

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

MAKING HIS WAY

THE PACE IS ADAGIO, the temper contemplative, so it is all the more surprising that the subject is Emperor Hirohito of Japan during the brief period between Hiroshima and surrender. *The Sun* was made by the Russian director Alexander Sokurov, who is noted, among other reasons, for the slow tempo of his films. Except for his feature-length careering through the Hermitage in St. Petersburg (*Russian Ark*), he has often chosen to meditate on shots, making that meditation part of the picture's progress. *The Sun* is quite different. This film never consciously pauses in the former Sokurov style, yet the atmosphere in which the action occurs seems contrapuntally thoughtful.

With a screenplay by Yuri Arabov, the film is unique immediately because it deals with human divinity. Though Hirohito often says that he has a body like everyone else, and though we see the dailiness of his life, to his staff, and to the people of Japan, he is descended from the sun and is a god. So his divine being requires the deliberate rhythm of the film: it could hardly hurry. Obliquely, the way that he is regarded is a reminder that the fury of the Japanese armed forces in World War II had its base in religious fervor unknown elsewhere. The idolized Hitler was a familiar figure to his zealots; Hirohito, though sometimes seen by the Japanese, was never even actually heard by them until the end of the war.

ANTHONY RUSSO

Sokurov explores the behavior of a god after his country is atom-bombed, as defeat closes in. For a brief time Hirohito maintains both his mortality and his godhead. At the start of the picture, he is awakened and dressed, is told his agenda for the day. It includes all aspects of his being. He attends a military meeting and tells some opposing generals that he doesn't want the war pursued. (After he leaves they continue to argue.) Then the other Hirohito visits a marine biology lab and investigates a crab—this lab is a favorite of his. Then he writes to his son and looks through family photo albums. He even has an album of Hollywood stars, though he says later that he doesn't care for cinema. The day ticks on and on. We see an individual trapped between tradition and reality, not to draw sympathy from us but a sense of fate growling at the gate of past centuries.

Though he dreams later of Hiroshima, though he sees some bomb damage in Tokyo from his limousine, it is only after General MacArthur is established in Tokyo that the texture of Hirohito's life begins to change. MacArthur invites him to call, instead of calling on him. Hirohito accepts, knowing what acceptance means. (They converse in English: Hirohito knows several languages.) When the emperor leaves, MacArthur remains seated, and no staff member is on hand to open the door. This is the only time that we see the emperor open a door for himself. Later MacArthur invites him to dinner, just the two of them; smokes a cigar with him; and then sends him a box of Hershey bars.

MacArthur, we feel, is moving cagily. He wants to bring the divinity down to earth at the same time that he doesn't want to anger the Japanese people. The schism seems fused when at last the emperor-god speaks on the radio—the first time that his people have heard him—to declare an end to the war and to renounce his divinity. He then agrees to be photographed, and when he appears in front of the palace, unattended, in a suit and homburg, the U.S. Army photographers don't at first realize that he is the emperor.

The fascination of this film is not only that all its contradictions are true but that we see an immense historical change embodied in one slight figure. Issey Ogata, who plays Hirohito, creates a man who, versed in the world, understands the pathos of his power. Sokurov, whose own country has had its sanguine encounters with Japan, helps Ogata to step out of the chronicles into rueful oddity. The film has some curious lip-synching at times—inexplicable because the Japanese actors speak their own language. Nonetheless, *The Sun* is clearly the work of a director with exceptional curiosities and resources.

THE SUN
Lorber Films

THE WEDDING SONG
Strand Releasing

ACT OF GOD
Zeitgeist Films

THERE HAS BEEN no shortage of films from the Middle East about emotional attachment between a Jew and a Muslim, usually a man and a woman. In *The Wedding Song* the attachment is between two nubile girls—not lesbian, simply sisterly love—and the place is an Arab city, Tunis, during the German occupation in 1942. Written by its director, Karin Albou, who also plays a major role, *The Wedding Song* explores the contrasts and conflicts we might expect, and it illuminates them all, but it also opens an even larger matter.

At the start Arab children actually do sing a wedding song that recurs throughout the picture—sometimes apt, sometimes sadly not. Then we see a belly dancer who is part of the engagement party for two Muslim cousins, Khaled and Nour. The latter lives across a courtyard

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from Myriam, her dear Jewish friend. Myriam is not engaged, but her mother, played by Albou, is trying to alter that. The war hastens her. The Allies have bombed Tunis—we see and hear some of the raid—and the authorities have levied a heavy fine on the Jews of Tunis to pay for the damage. (Since the entire war was craftily engineered by Jews, say the authorities, the Jews of Tunis should pay for the havoc that other Jews caused.) Myriam's mother wants her to marry a wealthy Jewish doctor, an older man, who can help with her share of the city's fine.

The double story plays itself out in cultural contrasts between its two strands, with somewhat more attention to Nour because she wants to be with her fiancé and Myriam doesn't even like her proposed fiancé. We see some Muslim practices and attitudes toward women (including an explicit scene in which a bride-to-be has her pubic hair removed so that she will have a satin skin for her groom). Khaled and Nour are themselves too impatient to wait until marriage for sex, which leads to a wedding-night trick. Nour is supposed to be deflowered that night. Khaled nicks her ankle with a knife and stains a sheet, which is then passed out the door to a group of waiting women who sing and celebrate.

Myriam's story is otherwise settled. But engaging as the two stories are, including their quarrels and reconciliations, what Albou has essentially and embracingly evoked here is a suffusing atmosphere of femaleness. Males abound in the film, but the communion of women prevails. The very scent in the air is of the beings of women, physical, emotional, unarticulated but understood.

From the opening belly dance through the depilation to the marital maneuverings of Myriam's mother, we move in a world where men seem both the raison d'être of the stories and intruders. Albou keeps the camera so close to female faces so much of the time that we are enclosed in a wave of gender. The cinematographer, Laurent Brunet, tints many shots with a hint of blue that deepens the intimacy.

Olympe Borval plays Nour with understanding and heat. Lizzie Brocheré is even more skilled as Myriam. Albou herself, as Myriam's mother, has strength and presence. They and all the others negotiate the turns and crannies of the stories with conviction, but ultimately what we are left with is the aura of femininity.

One invaluable function of the documentary is to reveal the interest in commonplaces. Such a film was a German documentary about dust last year. *Act of God* is a documentary about lightning by Jennifer Baichwal. I have myself been keen on the subject of lightning ever since I was fifteen, when I had a summer job on a dairy farm in upstate New York. After a severe thunderstorm one night, I went up the hill next morning to get the cows for milking and found one of them prone and, seemingly, inflated. She had been struck by lightning. Her hide was untouched, but it was as if she had been made of rubber and had been blown up. The stroke had in fact incinerated her insides.

Lightning always reminds me of that cow, of chance as fact. Baichwal's film underscores this view. She investigates lightning strikes and the lightning-struck—and those who have witnessed the phenomenon. The film is bookended by the novelist Paul Auster. He says at the beginning that when he was fourteen, at a summer camp, he and some other boys were trapped in a severe storm. The film finishes with Auster telling us that a boy who was only a few feet from him was killed, that it was only a few seconds' movement that took the other boy and not him. The randomness, the happenstance, the sense of space as possible enemy are the subjects of the intervening film.

Baichwal has traveled for her material—all of which, though anyone's chance of being hit is only one out of 700,000, is sobering. In France we visit a museum of objects that have been struck by lightning. In Las Vegas we meet a man who was struck by lightning, was severely injured, recovered, and became a spiritualist teacher. In Cuba there is a group, descended from Africans, who see lightning as an African god from an earlier religion who still has the power to vent his anger below. In Mexico we meet survivors of a lightning storm that killed several children gathered around a gigantic cross on top of a hill. (We later see the cross being taken down and moved away. This shot may not have been meant to have implications, but it can't escape them.)

Inevitably there are many shots of lightning flashes, but more startling are the shots of stormy skies. Views of the sky in films are usually sunny—sunrise, sunsets, etc. Stormy skies have an entirely different character—almost like beautiful warnings. In any case, Baichwal's film brings us safely close to a danger that, as I happen to know, we never think about until it strikes somewhere, as it always can. ◆

David Hajdu on Music
PRETENDING

When smug old children of the 1970s such as my friends and I get together, we play a game. We talk about the bands we loved when we were kids; we trade grumbles about the fact that music no longer seems to dominate youth culture, as we nostalgically recall the role that rock had in our past; and we try to guess what happened. I call this a game and not a discussion, because really it is diverting silliness that boils down to a competition to reach an agreed-upon goal—that is, to prove our generation's superiority to our successors. The winning answers are invariably ones that reinforce an idealized conception of the classic-rock era more than they illuminate the present. They reiterate the dubious truism that rock was so magnificent in the 1960s and 1970s that it demanded attention in a way that no music that followed it could. And they cast as revelations the perfectly obvious point that contemporary pastimes such as video games and digital networking have taken up the social function of music.

THE BEATLES: ROCK BAND

GUITAR HERO

There is a sizable problem with that line of thinking, and it goes by the names *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band*, the trademarks for two competing sets of video games that call upon its players to get together, listen to music, and pretend to perform it. If electronic gadgeting has supplanted music in the social economy of young America, one has to wonder what it means for games about music and music-making to have become the teen craze of the year. Is *Rock Band* really a replacement for the rock band, its digital mutant spawn, or another thing altogether?

It is tempting to interpret the phenomenal success of music-oriented games—especially the wildly hyped Beatles edition of *Rock Band*, introduced in September of this year—as evidence of music's

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return to the center of young life, or as validation of the aesthetic values of classic rock. The reality is more complicated and less flattering to boomerdom. For one thing, these games have fairly little to do with music. After all, they are games—like poker, the Olympics, or pro football; and like those and other games, they are, to varying degrees, largely about the pursuit of status and glory, wealth and sex. *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* involve musicianship in the same sense that chess involves military service. Rocking, like rooking, is the thematic action; but the content is the form, the rules.

For another thing—and this is the main failing of music games, and it is a significant one—they have the insidious effect of glorifying classic rock, a music with an already bloated reputation that is founded on its very bloatedness. In the games' absorption with technical prowess, speed, flash, grandiose show, and fakery, they not only affirm the enduring allure of classic rock to kids and young adults, especially males; they also advance its tyranny. People like me who have kids of video-game-playing age no doubt get many things wrong about these games, and chief among the errors of our age group, I think, is inflated generational pride in the 1970s-style arena rock that *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* promote to our descendants—kids who might otherwise, and perhaps more appropriately, use their after-school hours to nurture interests in music of their own. The games reassure us that our aftercomers are our heirs. They are male-oriented tools of cultural primogeniture, applications of twenty-first-century technology with a very ancient mission.

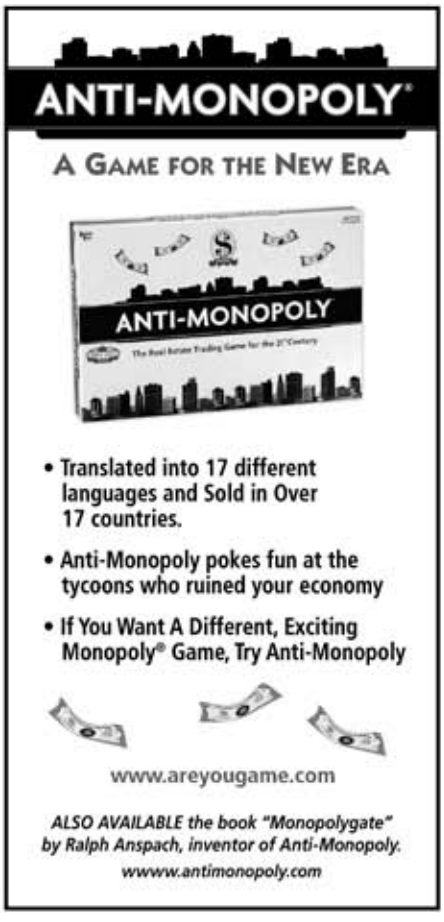
As anyone who knows anyone under thirty knows, music games have, over the past couple of years, become an inescapable presence in the dorm rooms and subdivision basements of America—and also, I presume, in the parlors of more childless homes than their ostensibly grown-up occupants would probably admit to their girlfriends or boyfriends or creditors. Since the first edition of *Guitar Hero* was introduced in 2005 (by the game developer RedOctane, which had worked on the arcade hit *Guitar Freaks*, in collaboration with Harmonix, a savvy programming group soon afterward bought out by MTV), more than twenty-five million copies have been purchased in sales totaling more than $2 billion. *Rock Band*, which is basically an upgraded spin-off of the guitar game developed by Harmonix for groups of people simulating performance on multiple instruments, came out about three years after *Guitar Hero*, and it has already sold more than four million copies in sales of about $600 million. Moreover, because it encourages music downloading of new songs for game play, it is responsible for some thirty million digital song purchases. Tim Geithner might do worse than license the Fed to Harmonix.

Over the past few months I have rationalized as research for this article several dozen hours playing both *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band*—alone, in online group sessions, with a couple of amateur-musician friends, and once with a colleague's fourteen-year-old son and his best pal. I came to the task happily, as a former garage-band guitarist and piano player with no particular enmity, and no particular zeal, for video games. I have never stopped any of my three kids from playing the games they liked, and I count as luck the fact that they have not been interested in the ultra-violent stuff. Still, our family time has never been spent sitting around the PlayStation console. Ours is more of a movie-night house. Playing *Rock Band*, I knew I looked ridiculous holding a cheesy plastic faux-Stratocaster; yet some of the best times I have enjoyed with my children have required me to look ridiculous. (For more than a few of those movie nights, we have all dressed in clothes to match the films.)

As with most video games, the play action of *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* takes place in a fictive landscape conjured in a vein of digital stylization now so familiar to gamers that it has become a form of realism, a projected reality of the digitally fabulous. As usual, the player is represented on screen by an avatar—in these games, either a real rock star or a custom hybrid of actual or player-invented characters such as one, say, with the hair of Billy Idol and the nose of your cousin Donny. The player chooses a song from the game's selections (or downloads one) and plays by fingering the colored buttons on one of the goofy, cheap-looking plastic instruments designed and marketed for the purpose. There's a bit more to the games, and they are not all the same, but the main idea is to approximate the notes played on a recording. With success at that, the player progresses, and the avatar gets richer and more famous. Billy Idol/cousin Donny goes from playing in small clubs to concert halls to stadiums, amassing more and more of the material benefits of rock celebrity—first a van, then a tour bus, eventually a private jet … grander stage sets and bigger speakers, more dry ice and lasers, larger and more adulatory crowds of sexed-up kids….

Elementally, then, the games are concerned with the creation of identity, the mastery of rules, and the navigation of social systems as means of earning distinction and rewards. It fits that they would appeal to adolescents (and regressive adults) struggling to come to terms with the grown-up world. There is no harm in all this, though clear dangers lie in the consequences of success in these games' schemes—that is, in their opulent glorification of ego-gratifying luxury, idolatry, and easy sex. Foremost among those hazards is the delusion that an ego adequate to achieving rock stardom can be gratified by any amount of anything.

Being games, *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* portray music as a kind of competition, and in this they are accurate. Classical musicians know this better than all others. Few contests are so fierce as tryouts for the New York Philharmonic, and the orchestra is only the third or fourth best in America. A viola player I know missed the cut for the Philharmonic about a decade ago, and although he survived to play in a good orchestra in a smaller city upstate,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he still has nightmares about his New York audition. "It was brutal," he says. "A hundred virtuosi—I don't know, probably more than that—and one job, and if you get it, there's another hundred new kids dying to replace you every year. Bloodthirsty business." The competition is no less brutal for less popular instruments, such as the oboe or the bassoon, because the scarcity of players is roughly proportionate to the scarcity of chairs.

In many styles of vernacular music, including jazz and bluegrass as well as rock, competitive gamesmanship has always been integral to music-making. Big-band battles, banjo duels, and electric-guitar ax wars have been perfectly effective and entertaining forums for players to demonstrate their technical competence and creative uniqueness, to prove their qualifications for membership in a closed musical society, and to help their peers through provocation. Duke Ellington, in his memoir *Music Is My Mistress*, recalled as formative his early experience watching the virtuoso stride pianist Willie "The Lion" Smith lord over Harlem cutting contests in the 1920s:

> This was the big thing about The Lion: [he was] a gladiator at heart. Anybody who had a reputation as a piano player had to prove it right there and then by sitting down to the piano and displaying his artistic wares. And when a cat thought that he was something special, he usually fell into that trap (or, you might say, into the jaws of The Lion) and he always came out with his reputation all skinned up, covered with the lacerations of humiliation.

If not for the stimulation of competition, we might not have quite the same music from Brahms or Schumann, from Dizzy Gillespie or Charlie Parker, from Lennon or McCartney, from Tupac or Notorious B.I.G., from Michael Jackson or Prince. (In a recent interview about Jackson, the concert promoter Randy Phillips quotes the late singer explaining his insomnia as a necessity of creative rivalry: "If I'm not there to receive these ideas, God might give them to Prince.") What's troubling about *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* is not the presence of competition in the context of music, but the terms of that competition: the values—or more accurately, the non-values—the games promote. The games measure performance almost entirely by two standards: speed and flash (accomplished by use of a whammy bar on the play guitars). The more notes you hit on the games' buttons and the more rapidly you hit them, the higher your score, the richer you get, and the more girls who thrust their gargantuan digital breasts your way. The imaginative power of the notes or the chords underneath them matter little; what counts most is the notes' quantity and speed. The music best suited to these games—the outrageously stupid big-hair arena metal that *Spinal Tap* first parodied twenty-five years ago—is and always has been blandly hyperactive and formulaic. It is music as grotesque as the games' porny electronic girls in the indiscriminate robot frenzy they are programmed, like *Rock Band* players, to enact.

The first instrument I ever owned was a little plastic Beatle guitar with four untunable plastic strings. I was nine years old. I coerced my hair out of a part, smashed it down into bangs, and believed I was a Beatle. In early Beatlemania, a great many people—including some in the Beatles' own organization—conceived of the group as nothing more than haircuts and show guitars. For my tenth birthday, I got what I thought of as a real instrument, a Silvertone acoustic guitar from Sears. Within a year I was in my first band, which my friends and I called the Ryders, for reasons lost to New Jersey grade-school garage-band history. We wanted to play Beatles songs but couldn't handle the chords in the Lennon and McCartney songs, with their sly harmonic twists; so with the help of an older boy in our neighborhood who played in a Monkees cover band, we learned his group's repertoire. The Ryders became an imitation of a cover band for a Beatles knockoff, and we had fun, if only as much integrity as I felt I had this fall, playing *The Beatles: Rock Band*.

Artistry often begins as fandom—as an aspiration, at first, not really to express one's creative identity but to take on someone else's. Like a zillion kids my age, I ventured into music wanting to be John Lennon, much as he had started out wanting to be Chuck Berry, who had started out wanting to be Louis Jordan. Real anxiety comes not with influence, but with the imperative to transcend it, which is another part of creative development. For me, being in that imitation Monkees cover group was different than playing air guitar but very much like taking part in a session of *The Beatles: Rock Band*. I wasn't pretending to play an instrument; I was pretending to play a Beatle.

The game, in which four players can imagine themselves as John, Paul, George, and Ringo (no user-created Fifth Beatle avatars allowed), makes commendable gestures to capture the group, but ultimately misrepresents and disserves it. Developed by Harmonix with the cooperation of the Beatles' company, Apple Corps, *The Beatles: Rock Band* presents the group as something it willfully and significantly abandoned being: a rock band. Giles Martin, the son of the Beatles' producer George Martin, worked on the game, and he has explained that "what I'm trying to do with this game is make people realize that it's just the four guys in a room making noise, and that noise comes from *them* and from nothing else. And you get that from playing the game." Originally—and from time to time until they broke up in early 1970—the Beatles were indeed a tight, rocking four-piece band. Yet they became something more interesting about halfway into their career, when they gave up concerts and largely abandoned the aesthetic of live performance to innovate the use of studio technology, making the recording, rather than the performance, the art form. Much of the Beatles' importance lies in the fact they rejected the rock-band tradition. For Giles Martin to claim otherwise is a strange betrayal not only of the Beatles, but of the person most responsible for facilitating their transmutation of pop into a studio art: his father. So much for pop primogeniture.

In the Beatles game, the standard *Rock Band* "Career Mode" is replaced with "Story Mode." Of course, the story the game tells is that of the band's career—or, rather, a simplified, prettified narrative of four boys just happy to make music together and how their joy and camaraderie brought them from the Cavern Club in Liverpool to the Ed Sullivan Show in New York to arenas the world round to fanciful imagined settings that rather nicely evoke the psychedelic era to, in the climax of the game, a blissful final set on the roof of the Apple Corps building in London. (The actual climax of the Beatles' career was their triumphant return to the studio sensibility, *Abbey Road*, an album made after the rooftop concert.) The digital Beatles are invariably depicted together, giddily making recordings that the actual fellows made in piecemeal fashion—two Beatles working one day, another overdubbing later, Paul subbing on drums because Ringo walked out, John playing lead because George didn't show up—sometimes in a storm of rampant egos, conflicting agendas, mistrust, and debilitation. Now, that is the stuff of real competition. It wasn't very good for the Beatles, but it would make a hell of a video game. ◆

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Jed Perl on Art

OUR BAUHAUS

This is an autumn of anniversaries in two of New York's most important museums. At the Museum of Modern Art, "Bauhaus 1919–1933: Workshops for Modernity," the exhibition saluting the ninetieth anniversary of the opening of the legendary German school of art, architecture, and design, also marks the eightieth anniversary of the founding of the Modern. Up north and to the east, the Guggenheim is capping the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of Frank Lloyd Wright's still astonishingly audacious building, now freshly restored, with a stirring retrospective of paintings by Vasily Kandinsky, whose work was at the core of the Guggenheim's mission when it opened its doors as the Museum of Non-Objective Painting on East 54th Street seventy years ago. The year 1939 was also highly significant in the history of the Museum of Modern Art: it was in November of that year, mere months after mounting a pioneering Bauhaus show late in 1938, that the museum unveiled its very own new building on West 53rd Street, a structure whose spare lines were closely related to the vision of a new architecture that had been promoted at the Bauhaus.

BAUHAUS 1919–1933: WORKSHOPS FOR MODERNITY
Museum of Modern Art

KANDINSKY
Guggenheim Museum

To recite these neat round numbers is to be reminded of the almost boundless excitement about modern art that animated some New Yorkers—and some Americans—in the second quarter of the twentieth century. I sense in this fall's heartfelt salutes to Kandinsky and to the extraordinary personalities in the fourteen-year history of the Bauhaus, where Kandinsky taught, a re-affirmation of that old modern, or modernist, enthusiasm. Under the directorship of Richard Armstrong, the Guggenheim has a chance of awakening from the nightmare of the Thomas Krens years, and the Kandinsky show has inspired an extraordinary response, with crowds lined up around the block to see the work of one of the most uncompromising, hell-bent, and, sometimes, inscrutable of all the masters of modern art. And I have a hunch that "Bauhaus 1919–1933: Workshops for Modernity" is going to be that most glorious and rare of museum events, a blockbuster with brains. The Modern, which has made more than its fair share of missteps in recent years, has this time around done itself proud. The curators involved are Barry Bergdoll, chief curator of architecture and design, and Leah Dickerman, a curator in the department of painting and sculpture. They are impressive scholars who treat the variegated products of the Bauhaus, which range from lamps and coffee pots to paintings, as part of the historical record *and* as works with a freestanding value. This supercharged exhibition is about nothing less than the triumphs and tribulations of modernity.

Consider for a moment the year 1919, when the Bauhaus opened its doors in Weimar. The very mention of that year (and of that city) sends a chill down the spine. A hideous war had ended. Europeans at last had reason to hope. But in retrospect we can see that the cataclysms that enveloped the continent only twenty years later were already set in motion. To return to the art of Kandinsky and to the history of the Bauhaus is to feel, once again, both the promises and the disappointments of those years, and how confoundingly they were sometimes intermingled. Progressive-minded artists, whether Marxist or not, were following the Soviet experiment, which was at first apparently friendly to the avant-garde—Kandinsky experienced it at first hand, living in Russia from 1914 to 1921, when he obtained an appointment to teach at the Bauhaus. Arriving at the Bauhaus, a state-supported school in a country whose new democratic institutions were always threatened by the forces of reaction, Kandinsky found himself amid a group of creative spirits, invariably the products of bourgeois society, who sought, individually and collectively, to revise the nature of that society.

At the Bauhaus, teachers and students talked and argued about everything—brilliantly, expansively. What was the place of artisanal production in an increasingly technological society? Were the arts a matter of individual expression? Would a new, more egalitarian society require a new, more egalitarian—and perhaps more impersonal—art? And until that new society became a reality, could radically new forms of expression be reconciled with capitalist methods of production? To these questions they offered many answers, most often in the form of actual objects and works of art, nearly all of them outrageously lovely, some of them indisputable masterworks, which now fill the galleries on the sixth floor of the Museum of Modern Art. Certainly, the Bauhaus had its fair share of ideologues, among them Walter Gropius, the architect who was director from 1919 to 1928, and wanted to create a new unity of the arts. But the truth was that there could never be any definitive answer, any ultimate Bauhaus faith: that was part of the school's greatness. And then Hitler came to power, and the questions could no longer be asked openly, at least not in Germany.

New York—indeed, America—had nothing to do with the formation of Kandinsky's art, and next to nothing to do with the dream of re-imagining the visual world that animated the Bauhaus. And yet in New York now, at a time when artistic expression seems more than ever at the mercy of impersonal technological forces, the questions that these men and women asked several lifetimes ago seem fresh, pointed, essential. In part this is because so many of the key figures at the Bauhaus ended up in America, including Gropius, Herbert Bayer, László Moholy-Nagy, Marcel Breuer, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Josef and Anni Albers. In America, the alumni of the Bauhaus, the teachers and the students, were formidable émigré presences, romantic optimists who to one degree or another had been mugged by reality. On American soil they picked themselves up and became preoccupied with new versions of the same questions about the relation between artistic innovation and industrial production, and the place of the individual in bourgeois society. Their impact on many aspects of America, from the art of the avant-garde to Madison Avenue ad campaigns and the postwar skyscraper style, was incalculable.

If a Bauhaus show now seems like the most natural thing in the world—certainly the most natural show to encounter at the Museum of Modern Art—it is to some extent because the Modern long ago waged the fight for the acceptance of tubular metal furniture, sans-serif type, geometric carpets, and paintings by Klee and Kandinsky. From *Good Old Modern*, Russell Lynes's history of the

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museum, I learn that New York did not exactly embrace the Bauhaus show of 1938 with open arms. Lynes quotes the newspaper attacks on the exhibition: "confusing, and still worse … gadgety," "clumsily installed," "little short of a fiasco," "chaotic." One reviewer found "something essentially heavy, forced and repellent in most of the Bauhaus work." Yet Alfred H. Barr Jr., the museum's founding director, would not be deterred. He had spent a few days at the Bauhaus two years before the museum opened, and there he discovered a vision of the unity of the modern arts that would influence the shape of the Modern, which promoted not only painting and sculpture but also photography, architecture, and design. The exhibitions of inexpensive, well-designed household objects that the museum inaugurated in the late 1930s, although sometimes criticized as a capitulation to market forces, were in fact Barr's admiring response to the old Bauhaus project of bringing modern taste to the masses.

The revolutionary dreams of the Bauhaus became our everyday realities, and in some cases our everyday banalities. And the two great shows being presented at the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim Museum this fall allow us to go back and figure out what went wrong—how the glorious promise of the Bauhaus became so terribly tarnished, and in so many respects misunderstood. Is it possible to go back to the future? I am not sure. But the other day, as I stood at the top of the ramp at the Guggenheim, it really seemed like a possibility. Just above my head was Frank Lloyd Wright's skylight dome, at once extravagant and austere, the work of a man who had deeply impressed many European architects, including Gropius, and had in turn been affected by their work (although he denied it). Looking across the rotunda, I could take in the unfolding spectacle of Kandinsky's late paintings, in which his perfervid romanticism had cooled to a Mozartean classicism—witty, delicate, lyrical, Olympian. Standing there, near the summit of the great spiral, I did believe that the old modern hopes could be hoped once again.

The Bauhaus show opens thunderously, with a cry of optimism. It is Johannes Itten's almost eight-foot-high *Ascent and Resting Point*, a cacophonous, visionary abstraction—a fantastical cathedral made of rising circles and triangles in hot, strident colors. And the exhibition's end is pianissimo, with five magnificent works by Paul Klee, ranging from the impassioned geometry of *Fire in the Evening* and *Highway and Byroads* to the mystical geology of *Castle Garden* and the tragicomedy of *Mask of Fear*. In between, a museumgoer is engaged by a bewildering array of objects and works of art, somehow gathered together so as to create an entirely convincing whole. Anybody who loves the decorative and graphic arts cannot fail to be entranced by this gathering of modern delights, which includes the sometimes fantastically shaped pottery pitchers produced in the early years in Weimar, the intricately woven hangings of Gunta Stölzl and Anni Albers, the precipitously asymmetrical designs for posters and books and magazine covers by Bayer and Moholy-Nagy, and Breuer's sleek, tubular metal furniture. There are architectural models, photographs, set designs, children's toys and furniture, ashtrays, fabrics, wallpapers, chess sets, and much, much more.

Oskar Schlemmer, drawing related to Schlemmer's performance *Das Figural Kabinett*, 1922-31

This deliciously heterogeneous display is held together by Bergdoll and Dickerman's sure sense of historical development and social dynamics. This is the first show that the Museum of Modern Art has devoted to the Bauhaus since 1938, when what was presented, we are now told, was a fairly distorted view of the evolution of the school. Organized by Gropius, who was then teaching at Harvard, and installed by Bayer, who also designed the influential catalogue, the 1938 exhibition entirely omitted the final five years of the Bauhaus, after Gropius had left, and also downplayed the early years in Weimar, when the influence of the painter Johannes Itten was strongest, and the orientation was more artisanal and perhaps mystical, with links to the spirit of the Arts and Crafts movement of the nineteenth century. What dominated at the Modern in 1938 was Gropius's vision of a school where individual expression was subsumed in the creation of a new visual order, what he called "a new and powerful correlation of all the processes of creation."

"Bauhaus 1919–1933: Workshops for Modernity" refocuses the story, conveying an especially strong sense of shifting goals and diverse personalities. The building that Gropius designed for the Dessau Bauhaus in 1927—represented at the Modern by a beautiful model of the striking, meandering structure, with its interlocking wings—is generally seen as the heart and soul of the institution. But here Gropius's Dessau building turns out to be only one element in a complex evolution. Bergdoll and Dickerman wish to emphasize the fluidity of the Bauhaus. In their telling, the fundamental courses dedicated to general principles of design, which influenced generations of art educators in the United States, seem less important than the intense activity in workshops devoted to weaving or metalwork, so that we have a sense of the Bauhaus as somewhat decentralized, composed of a number of overlapping force fields. Diversity, not unity, is the keynote in this brilliant new portrait of an institution that was for more than a decade regarded by many as the mecca of modernism.

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A lifetime—certainly a good deal more than fourteen years—seems to separate the folkloric earthiness of the early Weimar years of the Bauhaus as seen at the Museum of Modern Art from the arctic cool of some of the later displays. In the beginning there is a mood of barbaric fairytale adventure—in Lothar Schreyer's *Death House for a Woman*, a modern interpretation of a medieval recumbent funerary figure, and in the throne-like, crazily hyperbolic *African* chair designed by Breuer and upholstered by Stölzl. At the end there are students' architectural drawings done under the aegis of Mies van der Rohe when he was director of the school in its very last years, works that partake of the master's autocratic, elegant chill, and which can make the machine-tooled work of a few years earlier look friendly by comparison. Although the exhibition layout is essentially open, with spaces flowing one into the other, Bergdoll and Dickerman have skillfully provided us with peak moments, interludes, striking glimpses, and vignettes. There is a partial reconstruction of one of the houses that Gropius designed at Dessau for the key teachers, in this case Kandinsky's dining room, with its dark walls, its rather unappealing, awkward geometric furniture by Breuer, and Kandinsky's own *On White II* hanging on the wall. It is extraordinary to see Klee responding to the work of students, many of whom had been so profoundly affected by his ideas about structure and composition. The subtleties of his *Vocal Fabric of the Singer Rosa Silber*, a modern re-imagining of a page from an illuminated Renaissance songbook, is only further enriched when seen near some magnificent Bauhaus weaving. And the radiant geometry of Klee's *Architecture of the Plane* and *May Picture* are fascinating to study in relation to several of Josef Albers's rich yet astringent stained-glass windows.

Everywhere in the show I felt both the pull toward a unified Bauhaus style and the tug of many individual visions. It is in the nature of the Bauhaus story that it is many stories. And not all of them are easily told in an exhibition. When the architect Hannes Meyer took over as director in 1928, he wanted architectural form to be directly derived from a leftist analysis of social and political imperatives, and he was seen as moving away from Gropius's more formalist orientation. Meyer's vision—reflected here in drawings and photographs related to his Federal School of the German Trade Union Federation, completed in 1930—cannot register as clearly in an exhibition as certain other achievements, but Detlef Mertins's essay in the catalogue of the Modern show fills in the picture. In order to understand the relationship between Gropius's functionalism and Meyer's functionalism, one must grapple with the subtle and not-so-subtle differences between an architecture grounded in social idealism and an architecture that aims to respond to particular social situations and dynamics.

The excellent catalogue is organized around a range of brief essays by a number of scholars, each of which focuses on an individual object or group of objects. The essays zero in on specific works: Moholy-Nagy's experiments in enamel paintings, done by sending specifications to a fabricator; Alma Buscher's shipbuilding toy, a collection of variously colored and shaped blocks, and its relationship to ideas about childhood; the wallpapers that were developed at the Bauhaus, and were the only products still marketed under the Bauhaus name during the Nazi years. To tell the Bauhaus story as a seamless, end-to-end narrative may be impossible. Too much went on. I find it interesting that the catalogue of the other major ninetieth-anniversary Bauhaus show, which opened in Berlin in July, is also organized in terms of an array of brief, highly specific essays. Museumgoers who catch the Bauhaus bug will want to buy not only the Modern catalogue but also the English-language version of the German one, *Bauhaus: A Conceptual Model* (Hatje Cantz). Readers who want to further explore the controversies that have always surrounded the Bauhaus should consult two excellent essay collections, *Bauhaus Conflicts: 1919–2009: Controversies and Counterparts* (Hatje Cantz) and *Bauhaus Culture: From Weimar to the Cold War* (University of Minnesota Press).

The Modern has also published an English version of a terrific little book about the dominant figure in the textile workshop, *Gunta Stölzl: Bauhaus Master*, which juxtaposes Stölzl's drawings and weavings with excerpts from her diaries, letters, and articles. The result is a fascinating portrait of the Bauhaus artist as a young woman. Born in 1897, the daughter of a progressively minded school principal, Stölzl studied at the Royal School of Art and Crafts and served as a Red Cross nurse in World War I before being accepted at the Bauhaus in 1919. Like many women at the school, she was pushed into the weaving workshop, where she proved herself a great innovator—until it became evident to most of the students, in the mid-1920s, that Stölzl, and not the painter Georg Muche, should be the master of the textile workshop. With her elevation to master in the summer of 1926, she became the only woman to earn that title at the Bauhaus. Through her letters and diaries we gather the picture of a young woman of astonishing passion and determination. She created a scandal at the Bauhaus—progressivism has its limits—by giving birth to her first child some five weeks after marrying the father, Arieh Sharon, an architecture student at the school. Finding her way to Switzerland amid the collapse of the Bauhaus, she continued her career there. She died in Zurich in 1983.

Reading Stölzl's early letters to her brother, who was a lawyer, you feel all the romantic idealism of those years, the fearlessness about bucking conventions, the ardor with which art and life were embraced. In one brief memory she evokes a spirit of adventure and discovery that brings to mind the fictions of Nerval. "On long walks through the Thuringian Forest," Stölzl writes, "we came to an old glassblowing workshop and there we found in the attic old samples of completely fantastic, colorful glass animals—which we then also gave to [Paul Klee]—I seem to recall that he was very pleased." At the Bauhaus there was a love of fantasy as well as a love of functionalism. And although they were reluctant to admit it, functionalism sometimes became a form of fantasy. One certainly feels this in the costume parties and theatrical events that were so essential a part of life at the Bauhaus.

Gropius comes across in many accounts of the school as controlling and megalomaniacal, but it is one of the fascinations of the Bauhaus that he surrounded himself with men who were his equals and, in the case of Kandinsky, perhaps a more significant figure in the international avant-garde. With artists of the intellectual caliber and artistic

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daring of Klee and Kandinsky on the faculty, Gropius's insistence that all the arts were ultimately one art could hardly be the last word, at least not for everybody. It is difficult to imagine that he did not understand this. Could it be that somewhere in his calculations was the thought that conflict was necessary in a great educational institution?

By the time Kandinsky arrived at the Bauhaus in 1922, he had already proved that he could act as freely as any artist alive, perhaps more freely. Going through the early phases of the retrospective at the Guggenheim, I found myself thinking that no other artist had ever broken so definitively with the old sense of a painting as a mirror of the natural world, rejecting the afterimages of perspectival space and naturalistic color and Euclidean physics to which Matisse and Picasso were devoted even when they were at their most abstract. At first it may seem a paradox that Kandinsky was born in 1866, more than a decade before Picasso and Braque, but perhaps this explains his profoundly romantic spirit, a nineteenth-century spirit awakening to a twentieth-century vision of soaring mountains, galloping horses, swift-moving clouds, all turned into abstract gestures, motifs, glimpses, glances. His color is the strangest and most unexpected in modern art, with wild confrontations of strong, divergent hues set alongside colors that have been whitened and grayed and mixed (and mixed again). The effect is clamorous, disquieting, a play of moods, swiftly changing, flashing, disappearing, re-appearing. As for space, it is flexible, fluid, constantly improvised, a coming-into-being. At the Guggenheim, some of the greatest paintings of the years leading up to World War I form a magnificent group in the double-height room just off the beginning of the ramp. They are astral abstractions, topsy-turvydom apotheosized.

Kandinsky was generally regarded as an apolitical man, and surely the spirituality about which he wrote so movingly involved a rejection of all external forces, and thus could make him an anomalous figure in the socially aware ambience of the Bauhaus. In the 1920s, however, it was still possible to sense a relationship between the romantic individualism of Kandinsky and Klee and a larger progressive social enterprise, a connection that would become increasingly fraught in the 1930s, as the Depression and the rise of totalitarianism on the right and the left turned anything that suggested art-for-art's-sake into the ultimate dissident position. Kandinsky came to the school to teach form and color, but in short order he took over the mural-painting workshop, and later that year he produced mural designs for a room in an art exhibition in Berlin. This was not the act of a man who intended to remain in some fin-de-siècle ivory tower. Kandinsky's maquettes, with flurries of forms cascading across dark fields, were turned into full-scale wall paintings by his students, a sure sign that Kandinsky was not indifferent to the promise of a communal avowal, or to the possibility of teaching younger artists how to work broadly and publicly. But for Kandinsky public art did not signal the end of a more personal avowal, and a few years later he was instrumental in setting up at the Bauhaus a free painting workshop, where the art of painting could be pursued for its own sake, without reference to any other artistic activity.

Vasily Kandinsky, *Black Lines (Schwarze Linien)*, 1913

At the Bauhaus, Kandinsky's visual language became cooler, a system of signs and symbols through which he demonstrated the narrative possibilities of an abstract art. Many of the most beautiful works of his Bauhaus years are on paper, where we see his increasingly exacting analysis of his own moods, the conflicts between light and dark, hard and soft, geometric and biomorphic traced with a thrilling graphic exactitude. American critics, beginning with Clement Greenberg in the early 1940s, have seen in the architectonic discipline of the Bauhaus years a weakening of Kandinsky's art, but this strikes me as mostly a prejudice in favor of the painterly that cannot be justified by an unbiased examination of the work.

Kandinsky remained at the Bauhaus until it finally was closed by the Nazis in 1933. He moved to Paris in that year, and although various efforts were made to help him emigrate to the United States, he remained there through the Occupation and died in December 1944, only four months after the Allies liberated the city. In Paris he became, rather like the aging Poussin three centuries earlier, a romantic turned stoic who was still in some philosophical sense a supreme hedonist. *Thirty*, with that many black and light gray rectangles arranged in a checkerboard of subtly shifting dimensions, draws its ebullience from the watchmaker's precision of Kandinsky's draftsmanship. His panoply of jots, dots, squiggles, and arabesques, although rendered in black and gray, illuminate a monochromatic palette, suggesting color incarnate. *Sky Blue*, from 1940, is one of the greatest of all Kandinskys, with shivering, quivering forms suspended in a delicate blue infinity, as sublime as anything by Fra Angelico.

At the Guggenheim, the Kandinsky show fills the entire rotunda, with graphic works occupying galleries to the side. There are aspects of this exhibition that one might criticize. Perhaps the balance is slightly off, with a little too much space devoted to the early years. But the show, which has already been seen in Munich and Paris, is the Guggenheim's first full presentation since the 1980s, and I do not think we can ask for much more. Tracey Bashkoff of the Guggenheim is the curator in charge, and I mean it as high praise when I say that this exhibition offers no theory, no hypothesis, only a great artist straight on.

It is not easy for curators to resist the temptation to give historical material a dramatic spin, and no one ought to underestimate the quiet steadiness of purpose that Barry Bergdoll and

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Leah Dickerman have brought to their retelling of the Bauhaus story. This is an exhibition in which everything falls into place. The emphasis feels exactly right. Consider the perfect-pitch handling of Oskar Schlemmer's *Bauhaus Stairway*, the painting of figures moving up the stairway of the Bauhaus building in Dessau that for years was one of the very first works visitors encountered at the Museum of Modern Art, where it hung in the museum's own stairway, an invitation to the permanent collection. Painted in 1932, after the Nazi party had shut down the Dessau Bauhaus, the canvas was, as Andreas Huyssen observes in a skillful catalogue essay, a "melancholy memorial to the Bauhaus's utopian ambition." Hanging toward the close of "Bauhaus 1919–1933: Workshops for Modernity," *Bauhaus Stairway* is indeed a work in a valedictory mode. The show might have ended with the Schlemmer painting, a sentimental favorite, but the curators have chosen not to close on this theatrical and somewhat downbeat note, preferring to acknowledge the power of Schlemmer's composition and then shift our attention to the more subtly imaginative achievements of Klee, Kandinsky, and Josef Albers.

If there is going to be some criticism of "Bauhaus 1919–1933: Workshops for Modernity," it will probably echo the old complaints about Alfred Barr's—and his successor William Rubin's—historical exhibitions. These were sometimes said to underestimate or downplay the relationship between art and political and social forces. Although not always stated outright, there was a suggestion that by presenting what their detractors described as an essentially formalist reading of modern art, Barr and Rubin were making modern art more palatable for an upper-middle-class audience. Meyer Schapiro criticized Barr's "Cubism and Abstract Art" as "essentially unhistorical" back in 1936, two years before the Bauhaus exhibition was mounted, and although by the time he spoke at Barr's funeral Schapiro had changed his opinion, there always seems to be somebody who is ready to argue that the Modern is denying the political and social implications of modern art. My feeling is that Bergdoll and Dickerman understand what Barr understood, namely that the duty of a museum is to present the visual material in the most lucid and powerful manner possible, allowing museumgoers and scholars to draw their own conclusions. Bergdoll and Dickerman are well aware of the controversies that have always surrounded the Bauhaus, ranging from attacks on the allegedly dehumanizing qualities of the Bauhaus style to complaints that the school was less interested in transforming society than in finding a place for its products in the marketplace.

"Bauhaus 1919–1933: Workshops for Modernity" is bold yet richly detailed, clear yet never simplistic—it is everything that we want from a Museum of Modern Art show. I do not think it is incidental that both Bergdoll and Dickerman are relative newcomers to the institution. They have no use for the postmodern rehashing of the museum's history that made such an unholy mess of "MoMA2000," the Modern's attempt to assess its own past before construction began on the new building nine years ago. Bergdoll and Dickerman have embraced the museum's enormous role in the history of the Bauhaus without self-consciousness or embarrassment. They understand that the extraordinarily variegated achievements of the Bauhaus can speak for themselves, if only they are given a chance. So go to see "Bauhaus 1919–1933: Workshops for Modernity" and let the works speak to you. See where your thoughts lead. See what you discover. The Nazis may have shut down the school, but they could not dampen the Bauhaus spirit. We are all still students at the Bauhaus, especially this autumn in New York. ◆

Moshe Halbertal
THE IDEAL AND THE REAL

THE IDEA OF JUSTICE
By Amartya Sen
(Harvard University Press,
467 pp., $29.95)

In his introduction to *The Idea of Justice*, Amartya Sen asks the reader to imagine a scenario that will figure prominently throughout the book. Three children are arguing among themselves about which one of them should have a flute. The first child, Anne, is a trained musician who can make the best use of the flute. The second child, Bob, is the poorest of the three and owns no other toys or instruments. Clara, the third contender, happens to be the one who, with hard sustained labor, made the flute. Since philosophers try to reason about such distributive problems, each of the children can enlist support from a grand theory of justice that originated in what seems to be an impartial position in moral philosophy.

Utilitarians will opt for giving the flute to Anne, since their criteria for distribution is to give preference to the scheme that will maximize overall utility, thus granting the instrument to the individual who can derive the most pleasure out of it. Bob, the poorest child among the three, will be chosen by egalitarians, since the main concern of their distributive approach is to narrow social and economic gaps as much as possible. And libertarians, who emphasize rights-based ownership entitlements, will claim that Clara deserves the flute as the producer of the object, and that no other distributive concerns—egalitarian or utilitarian—can supersede her entitlement to what she naturally owns.

Since the publication of John Rawls's monumental book *A Theory of Justice* in 1971, such grand theories of distributive justice have gained momentum and depth. Rawls himself defended an egalitarian position. He articulated it in his famous difference principle, according to which deviations from strict equality may be allowed only if such deviations will work for the benefit of the worst-off. According to Rawls, perfect equality should have been the rule, but rewarding capable people with differential income will create an incentive for them to raise the production of the sum total of goods, which in a system of fair distribution might end up benefiting the people who are at the bottom of the economic ladder.

The ultimate merit of Rawls's work did not lie only in his own theory, but in the extraordinarily broad discussion that it generated. Rawls's work provided a framework for a flurry of counter-theories, such as G. A. Cohen's in *Rescuing Justice and Equality*, which challenged Rawls from the left and advocated a stricter egalitarianism; and Robert Nozick's sophisticated libertarian response in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*; and Michael Walzer's development, in *Spheres of Justice*, of a communitarian approach to the problem. Now comes Sen's magnificent book, which is dedicated to Rawls's memory, but differs dramatically

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from the Rawlsian and post-Rawlsian conversations.

Sen rejects, as a matter of principle, the nature of Rawls's project. The reader who seeks in this book yet another exercise in grand theory—another abstract discussion out of which the foundations for the institutions of a just society may be generated—will be disappointed. And the reader who wonders about the connection of all these abstractions about justice to the remedying of actually existing injustices will be glad. Sen questions the plausibility of such edifices of pure reason. His book quite radically attempts to shift the grounds of the conversation altogether. Its seeks to provide a counter-framework rather than a counter-theory. And this is only one of its many admirable ambitions.

According to Sen, a sustained and reasoned argument about justice should focus on a result-oriented comparative approach among different conditions, rather than on an attempt to formulate the philosophical conditions of a perfectly just society. We can confidently claim that a society that rejects slavery is more just than a society that endorses slavery. And such a sound comparison can be performed without actually having a clear-cut notion of what a perfectly just society would be like. Injustices are altogether easier to identify than the conditions of perfect justice. And injustices can be identified on the basis of various and competing grand theories, which may overlap in such actual comparative judgments. As Sen observes, we can assess whether a painting by Dalí is better than a painting by Picasso without making the claim that the *Mona Lisa* is the best or the most ideal painting of all. Constituting a perfect standard is not a necessary condition for the comparative work that has to be done in removing injustices. Nor is it a sufficient condition: we might have a clear conception of the perfectly just society and still find it difficult, or even impossible, to evaluate two options, two courses of action, that present themselves in real life. Each of these options, which will never be fully perfect, might be closer to perfection according to a different variable they each have.

Given the fact that having a perfect conception of the just society is neither necessary nor sufficient for the actual comparative judgments that are needed in real life, Sen concludes that such a project is quite redundant. To the redundancy argument he adds a deeper and philosophically more interesting argument for rejecting the very notion of the theory of justice. He argues that such an attempt is not feasible. Consider again that debate between the three children about the flute. According to Sen, each child makes a persuasive claim, and each of the grand theories that support such claims—utilitarian, egalitarian, libertarian—can withstand impartial scrutiny, and therefore each of them is right. There simply is no way to adjudicate between the rival grand theories that support different distributive schemes.

There is genuine humility in recognizing the intrinsic limits of our reasoning and the essential pluralism of value. Sen's conceptual sophistication is in the service of a rare intellectual modesty. Still, we must distinguish between two different interpretations of the rejection of the grand theory of justice, only one of which seems to me defensible. Sen, at different moments of his argument, asserts that indeed each of the proposed grand theories is right and has a strong case, and that we should therefore avoid the business of arguing about—and attempting to establish—perfect justice, because perfection can legitimately come in a variety of radically different forms. I think that such a view is implausible. There are some good arguments for rejecting libertarianism, and some of them are made by Sen in his book, and also in his previous works.

Imagine a slight shift in the parable of the three children. Let us assume that what is at stake for distribution is not a flute but a rare medicine that Clara, the brilliant and productive child, somehow managed to invent. She is willing to provide the medicine to Anne, who is very sick, but only for an outrageous compensation. If she does not get her coveted price, then Anne will die; and nobody—this is the libertarian claim—can take the medicine away from her, since she has ownership rights as a producer. In such a story, it seems clear that sticking solely to the libertarian approach to ownership rights, regardless of the outcome, is wrong. Even if we assert that there are such rights, surely they should not be absolute.

A serious argument can be made as well against the other grand theory—utilitarianism, the one that would have awarded the contested flute to the child who would get the most use out of it. In its sole interest in outcomes, utilitarianism tends to erase the individuality of people, as Rawls pointed out. In order to highlight this problematic feature of utilitarianism, let us once again alter the circumstances, and therefore the distributive stakes, of our parable. Let us assume that Clara needs a liver transplant and Anne a heart transplant to survive. From a strict utilitarian perspective, as a matter of principle, there is a justification for removing Bob's heart and liver. (Assume for the sake of argument that Anne's heart or Clara's liver cannot be used for transplants.) But such a violation of Bob's rights to the integrity of his body seems intuitively wrong. Moreover, the egalitarian approach is also vulnerable to serious criticism. If Clara is the only producer among the children, and everything that she produces is given by the egalitarian to the deprived child Bob, so as to minimize the social gaps, we can expect that Clara will stop producing altogether. And that will end up harming Bob, among others. (Rawls was himself concerned about this consequence.)

So it should be possible to state, and interpret, Sen's argument in a slightly different and sharper way. The problem with grand theories of justice, we might say, is not that each of them is, in its own way, right, but that by aspiring to grandness and exclusivity they are, all of them, wrong. The very attempt to produce a total and ultimate theory for a perfectly just society will inevitably generate injustice. This is the reason why Sen, after realizing the limitations of each grand theory, wisely resists any temptation to produce one of his own.

Following Sen, when we examine different grand theories we realize that each of them has a point, that there is an aspect—but no more than an aspect—of their respective claims that is convincing. Grand theories become perverse when they postulate themselves as exclusive, when they wish to solve all the complex issues with one decisive and final principle. Rights-based libertarians have a point, but their complete disregard of outcomes makes their position flawed. Utilitarians make an important contribution to the conversation, but their exclusive interest in outcomes is wrong. Egalitarians are deeply attractive for the principle that moves them, but their principle cannot withstand critical scrutiny when it is the only principle of justice there is.

The best way of making comparative judgments is by considering multiple points of view as they are refined by different theories, and weighing the diverse claims that they make. By rejecting an ultimate theory of justice, we do not paralyze ourselves, or surrender our intention to improve the world. Quite the contrary.

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We liberate ourselves for the full complexity of the challenge before us, and equip ourselves with all the elements of comparative reasoning that the evaluation of an injustice requires. Only when philosophy is deployed in this patient and pluralistic way can we apply it usefully to real people and real conditions.

It is important to note also that Sen's acceptance of the limited and relative force of each grand theory does not deteriorate into any kind of moral relativism. Pluralism is not relativism. Choosing between different approaches and policies is not an expression of taste or prejudice, a purely subjective effusion of passion. Such choice has a more general and objective and rational ground. In Sen's view, truth may be secured intellectually without our being in control of a single absolute criterion. In this connection, he develops one of the deepest ideas of his book—the notion that he calls positional objectivity.

Objectivity, Sen insists, is not omniscience, or a God's-eye view of things, or a view from nowhere. After all, we are always somewhere, in a specific position, with particular constrictions of perception and understanding. Yet we still can mentally correct for the limitations of our cognitive situation and make a rational judgment in choosing a policy and opting between alternatives. We do this—we arrive at objectivity—by means of a thorough examination of diverse points of view. This is also the procedure of democracy, which Sen likes to call government by discussion. In a true democracy, we are open to ideas and methods that originate outside our own cultural and political traditions. It is through such an examination of the relative weight of different arguments that we can approach a consensus about the truth of a matter, without claiming to possess any perfect or ideal or absolute standard.

Sen makes a powerful argument for adopting a particular standard in ranking and comparing the various approaches to proposed policies or states of affairs. In making such assessments, he says, we should consider the standard of capabilities, and their distribution across a society. By capabilities, he means the actual effective power that people have to develop their human potential and to act in the world. Such a scale measures relative conditions such as health, literacy, and freedom, which all combine together to measure the relative condition of people for the fulfillment of themselves and their community. In measuring capabilities, we must understand that sometimes the broadening of agency and effectiveness may bring about a decline in happiness. Deprived people with no choice might be happy about their condition, since happiness is often a function of limited expectations; and with rising expectations comes the revolution that bears their name, and also the possibility of disappointment and defeat. And yet, Sen insists, we should opt for agency and freedom rather than for sheer happiness.

In his emphasis on capabilities, Sen rejects two other measures of the condition of individual agency: income and well-being. Income is too narrow a criterion, since the capacity to convert income into actual freedoms and possibilities differs between people of similar means. If someone is limited by an illness or a handicap, his capacity to make use of a certain income will be very different from that of a healthier person. According to Sen, we should also avoid using well-being—which is very commonly supported among economists who deal with social choice—as a criterion for our approach to justice. The adoption of welfare, well-being, or happiness as the standard is based on an assumption that people are self-interested creatures who seek the fulfillment of their desires, and that the rational approach to assessing a social situation is measuring to what degree it offers maximization of self-interest. Well-being, in other words, is just a softer name for self-interest and egotistical harshness.

The repudiation of the economicist account of life is one of this book's most valuable achievements. People seek not only their own well-being but also the well-being of others, and often they are willing to make sacrifices so that others will benefit. In measuring their situation, therefore, we should consider also the degree to which they have the capability to contribute to others. Theorists who support the self-interest picture of "economic man" claim that this kind of altruism is actually reducible to egoism. In this economic view, people seek the good of others because it will make them happy. There is no essential difference between an altruist and an egotist—they both wish the fulfillment of their desires, but the altruist happens to have a desire that benefits others.

Such an argument is a reversal of the actual causal order. People do not seek the good of others because it will first make them happy. They are happy as a result of the help, the happiness, that they give to others: they wish to help for its own sake. The gratification that they receive from helping is hardly the primary reason for their help. Even more, Sen argues, the very capability and power

Be Kind

Not merely because Henry James said
there were but four rules of life—
be kind be kind be kind be kind—but
because it's good for the soul, and,
what's more, for others, it may be
that kindness is our best audition
for a worthier world, and, despite
the vagueness and uncertainty of
its recompense, a bird may yet wander
into a bush before our very houses,
gratitude may not manifest itself in deeds
entirely equal to our own, still there's
weather arriving from every direction,
the feasts of famine and feasts of plenty
may yet prove to be one, so why not
allow the little sacrificial squinches and
squigulas to prevail? Why not inundate
the particular world with minute particulars?
Dust's certainly all our fate, so why not
make it the happiest possible dust,
a detritus of blessedness? Surely
the hedgehog, furling and unfurling
into its spiked little ball, knows something
that, with gentle touch and unthreatening
tone, can inure to our benefit, surely the wicked
witches of our childhood have died and,
from where they are buried, a great kindness
has eclipsed their misdeeds. Yes, of course,
in the end so much comes down to privilege
and its various penumbras, but too much
of our unruly animus has already been
wasted on reprisals, too much of the
unblessed air is filled with smoke from
undignified fires. Oh friends, take
whatever kindness you can find
and be profligate in its expenditure:
It will not drain your limited resources,
I assure you, it will not leave you vulnerable
and unfurled, with only your sweet little claws
to defend yourselves, and your wet little noses,
and your eyes to the ground, and your little feet.

MICHAEL BLUMENTHAL

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to affect the lives of others for the better is the source of our moral obligation.

The spectacle of an economist rejecting a purely economic understanding of the individual is delightful to behold. And this wise and deep position—focusing on a comparative, results-oriented approach, which is measured by the actual capabilities that it offers human beings—is not based on Sen's arguments alone, important and penetrating as they are. His position expresses also a larger sensibility that is anchored in his exceptional range of thought and his lifelong commitments. Besides what he describes as his love affair with philosophy, he is a world-renowned economist and one of the greatest public intellectuals of India, who has been a leading voice for social and economic reforms, breaking new ground in the analysis of gender inequality, famine, and illiteracy.

Sen's range is amazing. His intimacy with the Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim cultures of India, which is beautifully woven into the book, gives him access to a far greater range of argumentation and reasoning than is common among philosophers who were educated exclusively in the Western analytical tradition. His knowledge of this vast cultural history, and his profound respect for it, is an important source of Sen's humility in recognizing the essential plurality of legitimate claims—in rejecting any sort of monism in the life of the mind.

This larger scope, I should add, enables Sen to teach—by example: he is not a preacher of any kind—a more nuanced sense of the complexity and the richness of Eastern and Islamic cultures. Though Sen is steeped in other traditions (some of which are, of course, his own traditions), his syncretism carries no threat of a clash of civilizations. Nor does it propound any kind of superficial harmony. Instead his work—in its simultaneous affirmation of the universal and the particular—serves as an eloquent and humane testimony to the power of reason, which respects (when it is honest and attends to the integrity of its arguments) the multiplicity of voices and traditions. Reason seeks truth wherever it may be found, and so, like the author of this genuinely important book, it travels widely, and may find support near and far. ◆

Christopher Benfey
THE HUNGER ARTISTS

DANCING IN THE DARK: A CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION
By Morris Dickstein
(W. W. Norton, 598 pp., $29.95)

DOROTHEA LANGE: A LIFE BEYOND LIMITS
By Linda Gordon
(W. W. Norton, 536 pp., $35)

AMERICAN HUNGERS: THE PROBLEM OF POVERTY IN U.S. LITERATURE, 1840-1945
By Gavin Jones
(Princeton University Press, 248 pp., $38.50)

"Let me tell you about the very rich," F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote in a story of 1926, at the height of the economic boom and his own creative powers. "They are different from you and me." Rich people "possess and enjoy early," he explained, which makes them cynical and haughty. "Even when they enter deep into our world or sink below us, they still think that they are better than we are." The passage is best known not for its psychological insight, but for Ernest Hemingway's withering rejoinder. Yes, the rich are different, he conceded: "They have more money." As with so many of their recorded exchanges, Hemingway is supposed to have come out on top. We are meant to feel that Fitzgerald, in his usual romantic way, believed that the rich really were better, and that he needed Hemingway's bracing realism to bring him back to earth.

But what if Fitzgerald had claimed instead that the poor are different? Even Hemingway entertained the idea that poverty—at least the bohemian frisson of being momentarily poor—might carry with it certain advantages. In *A Moveable Feast*, his memoir of Paris during the flush Twenties, Hemingway included a chapter in praise of hunger:

> You got very hungry when you did not eat enough in Paris because all the bakery shops had such good things in the windows and people ate outside at tables on the sidewalk so that you saw and smelled the food. When you had given up journalism and were writing nothing that anyone in America would buy … the best place to go was the Luxembourg gardens where you saw and smelled nothing to eat all the way from the Place de l'Observatoire to the rue de Vaugirard. There you could always go into the Luxembourg museum and all the paintings were sharpened and clearer and more beautiful if you were belly-empty, hollow-hungry. I learned to understand Cézanne much better and to see truly how he made landscapes when I was hungry. I used to wonder if he were hungry too when he painted.… Later I thought Cézanne was probably hungry in a different way.

Of course, one may feel that Hemingway is not describing real hunger, since his was voluntary: he had given up lucrative journalism for the riskier rewards of fiction. (Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* shows what it was really like to be a hungry American in Paris during the 1920s.) And besides, Hemingway's chapter ends with a check in the mail and a rousing dinner at the Brasserie Lipp. "Hunger is healthy and the pictures do look better when you are hungry," Hemingway concludes evenhandedly. "Eating is wonderful too."

Still, Hemingway's two kinds of hunger—the hunger that gnaws at the belly and the hunger that fuels artistic ambition—are central to any discussion of how poverty is represented by American artists and writers. Now three books have appeared that seek a fresh understanding of depictions of the poor in American life—what Morris Dickstein calls "the starvation army." Edmund Wilson—who crisscrossed the desperate country as a roving reporter for this magazine in 1931 and 1932, contributing to what Alfred Kazin called "the vast granary of facts on life in America put away by the WPA writers, the documentary reporters, the folklorists preparing an American mythology, the explorers who went hunting through darkest America with notebook and camera"—once observed "how difficult it is for persons who were born too late to have memories of the Depression to believe that it really occurred, that between 1929 and 1933 the whole structure of American society seemed actually to be going to

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pieces." Perhaps the experience of the past year has made it somewhat easier to imagine.

It is good to be reminded that poverty did not enter American literature with the crash of 1929 and the stark photographs of the Farm Security Administration. Gavin Jones identifies three main bodies of American writing about poverty, corresponding roughly to the aftermath of the Panic of 1837, the prolonged economic downturn of the 1890s, and the Great Depression. He finds that "moral and cultural approaches to poverty in the antebellum era merged into biological and social explanations in the Progressive age, and then into psychological and subjective responses during the Great Depression."

Before the Civil War, poverty was widely regarded as "a chronic rather than a temporary condition," Jones notes, with a family such as the disenfranchised Maules in *The House of the Seven Gables* "plebeian and obscure; working with unsuccessful diligence at handicrafts . . . living here and there about the town, in hired tenements, and coming finally to the alms house, as the natural home of their old age." Classic American writers showed little appetite for schemes to improve the lot of the poor. "Are they *my* poor?" Emerson asked sardonically in "Self-Reliance." Despite his employer's efforts to provide aid and shelter, Melville's Bartleby—whose "innate and incurable disorder," Jones notes, is defined as "poverty"—pursues a seemingly preordained trajectory to the Tombs.

Like Hemingway in the Luxembourg gardens, Thoreau endorsed a form of voluntary poverty in his experiment in radical self-reliance on Walden Pond. "Cultivate poverty like a garden herb, like sage," he counseled. But when he encountered actual poor people, poverty did not smell so sweet. "Often the poor man is not so cold and hungry as he is dirty and ragged and gross," he remarked. "It is partly his taste, and not merely his misfortune. If you give him money, he will perhaps buy more rags with it." Writing about an Irish immigrant neighbor named John Field, he was even crueler:

> With his horizon all his own, yet he is a poor man, born to be poor, with his inherited Irish poverty or poor life, his Adam's grandmother and boggy ways, not to rise in the world, he nor his posterity, till their wading, webbed, bog-trotting feet get talaria to their heels.

The biological explanation suggested in those webbed feet (talaria are the winged sandals worn by Greek gods) found more elaborate and harsh expression in the Social Darwinism of the late nineteenth century, and in the "Naturalist" generation of writers such as Jack London and Theodore Dreiser.

If Thoreau's "discovery of aesthetic virtue in socio-economic lowliness" seems oddly conjoined with his view of the poor as "a genetic throwback," Jones identifies a kindred tension in James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, the book he produced, along with the photographer Walker Evans, after spending a few weeks with poor farmers in Alabama during the summer of 1936. In addition to the near slavery of the tenant-farming system, Agee writes darkly of other factors contributing to chronic poverty: "There are in the people themselves, and in the land and climate, other sources quite as powerful but less easy to define, far less to go about curing: and they are, to suggest them too bluntly, psychological, semantic, traditional, perhaps glandular." Surely no American has written more beautifully—more lyrically, more ecstatically—about poverty than Agee, but Jones is understandably disturbed by the notion that for Agee "poverty *itself* is attractive and valuable from a literary standpoint."

Jones finds a more sympathetic account of poverty in Richard Wright, where "American Hunger," the original title of Wright's autobiography published in part as *Black Boy*, carries a rich double meaning. In Wright's view, hunger functioned as a spur toward creativity, but not of the voyeuristic kind Agee indulged in: "The major obsessions of Wright's life—with language, literature, religion, sex, and politics—are all figured in relation to the central fact of his hunger, whether it be physical, spiritual, cultural, or aesthetic in nature." With Wright's ambitious "want," we re-enter Hemingway's domain: the hunger of the belly contributes to the hunger of the creative imagination. "The conditions of Wright's poverty contain an element of independent striving toward self-consciousness and imaginative fulfillment, a 'hunger to be and live.'"

Those stirring words might describe the interesting career of the photographer Dorothea Lange, best known for her sympathetic portraits of migrant workers in California during the 1930s. "A Life Beyond Limits," the subtitle of Linda Gordon's feminist biography, alludes to the obstacles that Lange overcame. She was born Dorothea Nutzhorn in Hoboken in 1895. Her German-American father was a lawyer; her cultured mother, relieved of housework by a uniformed maid, was enthusiastic about classical music and jazz. Two traumas interrupted Lange's childhood. She contracted polio at age seven, which gave her a permanent limp; and five years later her father abruptly abandoned the family, amid rumors that he was a "gambler" and a "speculator." Dorothea, emotionally adrift and accompanied by her adventurous friend Fronsie Ahlstrom, explored New York City and was drawn to the modernist art scene.

Seeing Isadora Duncan dance was a revelation for Lange. "I had never been taken into the upper reaches of human existence before," she recalled; "to me it was the greatest thing that ever happened." She briefly attended a teachers' college, dropped out, and went looking for work. Arnold Genthe's photography studio was filled with images of Duncan. Born in Berlin and trained as a philologist, Genthe had emigrated to San Francisco the year Lange was born. A major figure in the history of American photography, he was the leading portrait photographer in the city, also photographing the San Francisco earthquake and Chinatown before shifting his studio to New York. Around 1912, Lange walked in and asked for a job. She was attractive; he hired her. Genthe gave Lange her first camera, along with a solid training in the tricks of manipulating and retouching negatives. He probably seduced her (she called him "an unconscionable old goat") and introduced her to "a world I hadn't seen . . . a world of privilege."

In 1918, Fronsie and Dorothea decided to travel around the world together. They got as far as San Francisco, where Dorothea Nutzhorn dropped her father's name for her mother's and became, following Genthe's lead, the society photographer Dorothea Lange. In 1920, she married the painter Maynard Dixon. While he painted heroic cowboys and Indians from the Old West, and had love affairs on the side, she was expected to keep house and take care of their two children—another of the "limits" that Lange had to move "beyond." Her troubling solution—to farm out their two sons, ages five and seven, to a distant boarding school—gave her the time she needed for her work as "San Francisco's most upscale portrait photographer, most in demand among the rich arty set."

Lange's major patrons were almost exclusively assimilated German Jews of a few families. "Wealthy and powerful, secular and urban," Gordon writes, "the 'Our Crowd' of San Francisco, their ancestors had immigrated in the mid-nineteenth century and built mercantile fortunes." According to Gordon, Lange "became

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so identified with this German Jewish community that several believed she was herself Jewish." Lange's photographs of her Jewish friends and patrons are exceedingly interesting, and I wish Gordon—who is eager to push the narrative forward to the far more famous Depression pictures—had lingered over them. She doesn't seem to notice that these, too, are images of American hunger, American aspiration. She reproduces a brooding image of the composer Ernest Bloch, and notes that unlike "glamour photography" Lange's portrait does not "sing out star." She reproduces a photograph of a boy and his grandfather, from the Katten family that all but adopted Lange, and notes only that it is "exquisite." A bare-shouldered portrait of Lange's friend Edythe Katten from 1933, "a dramatic, austere beauty with large features," inspires speculation about sexual attraction between the two women, but nothing much about the picture itself beyond the stray observation that Lange's portraits of women "are, on average, mistier than those of men."

For all the inwardness and the exquisiteness of these portraits, we are meant to feel that we are not yet in the presence of Lange's mature work. "In the spring of 1932 San Francisco portrait photographer Dorothea Lange looked down from her second-floor window and saw the Depression," Gordon writes, in an italicized section set off from the rest of her narrative:

> Her walls held portraits of the Levi-Straus family, the Freudenthals, the Fleishhackers, the Haases, the de Youngs. The streets below displayed images of unemployed men loitering on corners or standing in breadlines, homeless men huddled around fires or hiding in their bedrolls. They were not only bums in ragged clothes and workingmen's caps but also men in suits and fedoras.

Lange's photograph of the White Angel Mission portrays downcast men standing along rails that resemble pews; one man in a battered hat turns toward the camera, extending beseeching hands. We are invited to believe that this was the birth of documentary photography, and the moment when Lange found her true vocation: "Dorothea Lange turned onto a new path in 1932, walking in step with her country." In the next three years she would transform her life, banishing false values for true ones. "Lange would close her studio permanently and become a documentary photographer.… She would leave her marriage, having fallen in love with an extraordinary man," the progressive agricultural economist Paul Taylor.

Some of Gordon's strongest pages cover the curious origins of the Farm Security Administration. She is not the first to note the irony that the FSA largely failed in its attempt to improve the lot of struggling rural farmers, and that its greatest success was its small public relations wing, run by Roy Stryker, and the handful of gifted photographers he hired—including Walker Evans, Gordon Parks, and Dorothea Lange—to provide cheap images to newspapers and magazines. Lange spent much of 1935–1939 on the road, photographing destitute migrant workers in California. *Migrant Mother*, her photograph of a pensive woman with her hand on her chin flanked by two tow-headed children with their heads bowed against her and their faces turned away, is one of the best-known of all American photographs. It is interesting to learn that this icon of maternal heroism was an American Indian named Florence Thompson, born on a Cherokee reservation in Oklahoma. Gordon suggests that *Migrant Mother* may be a disguised self-portrait, since "nothing in Lange's personal life was as fraught as her own motherhood."

Gordon gives a full picture of Lange's long career, including her courageous campaign to photograph the roundup of American citizens of Japanese descent after Pearl Harbor and their forced resettlement in distant camps. But she has little talent for describing Lange's photographs. She cannot compete with Morris Dickstein, who notes that Florence Thompson's "brow is furrowed like tractored-out land." Gordon calls Lange, approvingly, a "visual sociologist," and she is attentive to photographs as evidence of social conditions. "Frequently," she claims, "one needs a magnifying glass to extract fully the information out of her photographs, and it would require pages to write down everything that Lange made visible."

But this is not how we are accustomed to look at photographs, nor is it what Lange intended. Gordon's terminology of aesthetic appreciation is severely restricted: her terms of opprobrium, all roughly synonymous for her, are "romantic," "idealized," and "sentimental." There was certainly a political shift in Lange's photographs of the 1930s, from portraits of wealthy Jews to poor migrant workers, but how much of an aesthetic shift was there? Not much, Gordon concedes. "Her documentary photography *was* portrait photography," Gordon says. "What made it different was its subjects, and thereby its politics."

Morris Dickstein's lively and omnivorous book, which explores the whole range of "the expressive culture of the thirties—the books, films, murals, photographs, reportage, radio programs, dance, and music"—proposes a larger frame for Lange's fascination with the mobility of Isadora Duncan and the paralysis of Florence Thompson. Dickstein notes that the rise of documentary photography, with its persistent imagery of entrapment and stasis, coincided with the great period of American dance: Martha Graham, Fred Astaire, and Busby Berkeley. Mobility of all kinds, especially downward mobility, was one of the great subjects of American culture in the Thirties. The most creative minds were as preoccupied with the question of what made the rich tick on their downward plunge as with the living conditions of the poor "frozen into postures that allow little movement, no escape." Audiences never seemed to tire of the spectacle of rich people suddenly plunged into dire straits. The runaway society bride in *It Happened One Night* must learn to hitchhike and survive on raw carrots. The movie director in *Sullivan's Travels* wants to learn how the other half lives and ends up, by a series of accidents, joining them.

Such experiments in misery were nothing new in American art. Stephen Crane, probably inspired by Jacob Riis's photographs of urban misery, dressed up as a pauper and spent the night in a homeless shelter during the depression of the 1890s. Crane's "Dantean descent into the lower depths," as Dickstein calls it, "became a prototype for thirties writers drawn uneasily to confront the hunger, poverty, lassitude, squalor, and fear that festered during the Depression." (Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed* recently proved that there is still life in the tired formula.)

Yet Dickstein is less interested in how accurately writers and artists of the 1930s depicted the rich and poor than in the quality of the art that they produced, especially those "unusually complex, enduring works" that "speak for their times yet still speak intimately to us today." He is wary of arguments that exclude more than they include—the persistent claim, for example, that the major writing of the period was leftist in inspiration. He insists that a comprehensive account of American culture in the Thirties cannot exclude the best American writers of the time—Faulkner, Fitzgerald—even if they

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were not "responding specifically to the economic and social crisis that followed the Crash."

Dickstein is drawn to unexpected affinities of temperament (Delmore Schwartz, say, and that other erratic balladeer Woody Guthrie) rather than old ideological divides. He notes the many ways in which Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* borrows theme and structure from Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, while remarking that Faulkner knew rural poverty in the South firsthand in ways denied to upscale visitors such as Agee, whose prose style was modeled on Faulkner's. He believes that during the Depression the arts "bound people together in a collaborative effort to interpret and alleviate their plight," and, like the New Deal, "offered a stimulus of optimism and energy."

The emotional heart of Dickstein's book is a passionate engagement with the boom-and-bust writing of Fitzgerald, "America's greatest novelist of the dream of success and the inevitability of failure." Fitzgerald has often been criticized for his fixation on the rich, in *The Great Gatsby* and elsewhere; but Dickstein notes that he "deliberately wrote about them from the viewpoint of the outsider: the middle-class provincial, or the poor boy striving for a foothold in a world beyond him." Fitzgerald's personal crisis—the institutionalization of his mentally ill wife and his own descent into alcoholism—coincided with the crash. In his devastating story of the end of the Jazz Age, "Babylon Revisited," he wrote of the waste of the expatriate years. A waiter at the Ritz makes small talk with the protagonist, who has returned to Paris, momentarily sober, to reclaim his daughter. "I heard that you lost a lot in the crash," he says. "I did," comes the answer. "But I lost everything I wanted in the boom."

Dickstein makes a strong case for *Tender Is the Night*, a novel flush with the traumas of the times, as a central document of the Depression. It is about a generation that has lost its illusions with the senseless butchery of World War I—a form of war invented, according to one character, not by General Grant but by Lewis Carroll and Jules Verne. It is about a rich young woman who bears the emotional scars of an incestuous relationship with her own father. And it is about the ambitious psychiatrist who treats that woman and marries her, only to have the marriage founder on the rocks of alcohol and his own eagerness to please. In the tragic plight of Dick and Nicole Diver, Dickstein argues, Fitzgerald tried to build a new career by exploring the ways in which he had been overextended, self-destructive, like America itself during the Boom years. Though few could see it at the time, Fitzgerald made his personal plight—the disintegration of his marriage, his health, and his career—somehow definitive of the age.

For Fitzgerald and many other people who lived through it, the Great Depression felt like the greatest disruption in American life since the Civil War. *Gone with the Wind*, one of the great commercial successes of the decade in print and film, could have served as a title for Steinbeck's novel of dust-bowl solidarity; the title he chose instead, *The Grapes of Wrath*, came from "The Battle-Hymn of the Republic," a poem written during the Civil War. Walker Evans, in search of a Flaubertian aesthetic of detached observation, found it in Mathew Brady's photographs of Civil War soldiers and battlefield carnage.

Halfway through *Tender Is the Night*, Fitzgerald compared Dick Diver to another heavy drinker with high aspirations, Ulysses S. Grant, "lolling in his general store in Galena … ready to be called to an intricate destiny." Diver aspires to be "a good psychologist—maybe to be the greatest one that ever lived." How "very American," his Swiss colleague observes of Diver's hunger to excel. But Diver finds that the independence he thought he was acquiring in marrying Nicole has imprisoned him instead. Having published a best-selling but facile primer on psychology that he himself has "outgrown," he aspires to something bigger, more consequential, like Grant's service in the Civil War. But he is too comfortable, too charming, and ultimately not hungry enough.

Fitzgerald spent nine years writing *Tender Is the Night*, stitching and unstitching the fabric of the novel and doubting, Diver-like, his own ability to complete it. "It is needless to compare the force of character between myself and General Grant," he wrote his editor Maxwell Perkins in 1936. But Fitzgerald, who had divined the interconnection of the two kinds of American hunger, had his moment after all, writing one of the central books of his generation. Late in his short life—he died in Hollywood in 1940, at the age of forty-four—he reflected on his old rivalry with Hemingway. "I talk with the authority of failure—Ernest with the authority of success," he wrote. "We could never sit across the same table again." ◆

Caryl Phillips
THE EXPLORER

AMERICAN WRITINGS
By Lafcadio Hearn
(Library of America, 848 pp., $40)

In 1854, Commodore Perry steamed into the port of Yokohama and opened Japan to international trade. The subsequent era of the Meiji Restoration, which lasted until 1912, saw Japan begin slowly to transform itself from an insular, somewhat feudal society into a modern nation. Western envoys sent back dispatches about this mysterious country, whose traditions aroused fascination and suspicion in equal quantities. In the West, Japanese art and culture became all the rage, a vogue that reached its apotheosis in 1885, when Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado* became a huge hit on the London stage.

The few from Japan who travelled abroad sent back their own reports about Western traditions and ideas. Chief among them was the writer Natsume Soseki, who journeyed to Britain at the end of the nineteenth century, but found it difficult to understand these tall, gangly strangers. Soseki's stay in London was miserable. Upon returning to Japan in 1903, he was offered a position at Tokyo University. He was both pleased and perplexed: pleased, because it was a distinguished professorship which recognized his achievements as a scholar and teacher; perplexed, because the writer he was replacing, Lafcadio Hearn, was held in high regard as the chief reporter to the West of all things Japanese. Hearn was married to a local woman, and he was the father of four children born in Japan. The non-renewal of his contract was as much a shock to Tokyo University's outraged students and faculty as it was to Hearn, who never really recovered from the blow. A little over a

Caryl Phillips's latest novel, In the Falling Snow, has just been published by Knopf Doubleday.

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year later, the fifty-four-year-old author died in Japan, a somewhat broken man.

Patrick Lafcadio Hearn was born in 1850 on the Greek Ionian island of Lefkas to a Greek mother, Rosa Cassimati, and an Anglo-Irish army doctor, Charles Hearn. When he was two the infant was sent to Ireland with his mother, and they took up residence in Dublin with a great-aunt, Sarah Brenane. Two years later his increasingly unstable mother left Ireland for Greece, and two years after that his parents divorced. After his mother's departure, Hearn never again laid eyes on her, and eventually she died in a mental asylum on Corfu. Hearn was now the ward of his sternly religious great-aunt, and his relationship with his peripatetic father was, in all senses of the word, distant.

A small, shy boy, Hearn attended a series of rigorously disciplined Catholic boarding schools in Ireland and England, where his experiences were uniformly miserable. His unhappiness was compounded by a playground accident that resulted in the loss of sight in his left eye when he was sixteen. Soon after, Hearn's estranged father died, and a year later his great-aunt declared bankruptcy. The publicly shamed boy was forced to withdraw from school. No longer able to contemplate attending university, young Paddy Hearn lived for a short while in great poverty in Dickensian London before, at the age of nineteen, boarding a ship bound for the United States.

After some months as a semi-destitute waiter and dishwasher in New York, Hearn set out for Cincinnati, hoping to find a family contact in the great riverfront city. Instead he happened upon work in a printing shop that was run by an Englishman named Henry Watkin, who offered Hearn a place to sleep in exchange for keeping the shop clean and running errands. Watkin was a great raconteur, and a lover of Eastern philosophy and the generally bizarre, and he discovered in Hearn a young man whose eccentric tastes matched his own.

Hearn's profoundly unhappy memories of school, and then London's filthy underworld, had led the young immigrant to cultivate a sense of himself as an outsider. He adopted a new and somewhat Gothically inspired identity in which he imagined himself to be a maverick whose tastes were rooted in the culture, folklore, and mysticism of the past, as opposed to the crass materialism of the contemporary world. He found inspiration in the work of Edgar Allan Poe; but his true spur to self-definition was not literature, it was his unhappy life experience. Society never seemed to recognize this small, dark, displaced boy, and if the world would not recognize him, then he saw no reason why he should recognize it.

In 1872, the twenty-two-year-old Hearn presented himself before the editor of the *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer* and asked to be paid for contributions that he intended to make to the newspaper. Hearn had decided that journalism and translation would have to be tolerated so that he might earn a living until he transformed himself into a real writer. He proposed pieces not so much about the gentle antebellum world of Cincinnati, but about the people who made up the lurid underbelly of the city. He was particularly interested in the riverfront world of the Negroes with their songs, folktales, and superstitions, which suggested to him a genuine connection to an authentic past.

The editor was unconvinced by the young man, whom he later described as a "quaint dark skinned little fellow," but he gave the brash youngster a chance, and Hearn began to write with a pen that veered from sensationalism to romanticism, depending upon the subject to hand. His dramatic reports quickly won him a wide audience. In 1874, a particularly ghoulish article called "Violent Cremation," about the lynching of a supposed murderer, made him something of a local celebrity. He described the body of the cremated man as being reduced to

> a hideous adhesion of half-molten flesh, boiled brains and jellied blood mingled with coal. The skull had burst like a shell in the fierce furnace-heat, and the whole upper portion seemed as though it had been blown out by the steam from the boiling and bubbling brains.... The brain had all boiled away, save a small wasted lump at the base of the skull about the size of a lemon. It was crisped and still warm to the touch. On pushing the finger through, the crisp interior felt about the consistency of banana fruit and the yellow fibres seemed to writhe like worms in the Coroner's hands.

In the same year that Hearn published "Violent Cremation," he extended his professional interest in Negro life into the personal sphere by marrying Alethea "Mattie" Foley, an illiterate black teenager born into slavery in Kentucky who worked at the city boarding house in which Hearn lodged. The association was, of course, illegal, but in a newspaper article that he wrote about Foley in 1875 one can sense that beyond his physical attraction for her, he was also won over by her love of storytelling:

> She had never learned to read or write, but possessed naturally a wonderful wealth of verbal description, a more than ordinarily vivid memory, and a gift of conversation which would have charmed an Italian improvisatore. These things we learned during an idle half hour passed one summer's evening in her company on the kitchen stairs; while the boarders lounged on the porch in the moonlight, and the hall lamp created flickering shadows along the varnished corridors, and the hungry rats held squeaking carnival in the dark dining-room. To the weird earnestness of the story-teller, the melody of her low, soft voice, and the enthralling charm of her conversation, we cannot attempt to do justice.

When word leaked out of Hearn's irregular marriage, the *Enquirer* terminated his employment. But Hearn was by now too celebrated a journalist to find himself idle for too long, and the rival newspaper, the *Cincinnati Commercial*, soon picked him up. By this time Hearn's controversial marriage had already begun to fall apart, and the aspiring young writer was beginning to tire of Cincinnati, and of his notoriety as Paddy Hearn, sensationalist journalist. He was ready now to stop wallowing in the outlandish, and make a concerted effort to become a literary man. A move to New Orleans would allow him the opportunity to look at the old French culture of the country, plus give him the chance to engage with the creolized Negro population who were steeped in a folklore tradition richer than that to be found on the banks of the Ohio River. In 1877, Paddy Hearn left for New Orleans, and somewhere along the way he re-invented himself as the more romantic-sounding Lafcadio Hearn.

At first Hearn was convinced that he had arrived in paradise. He loved the sedentary pace of life, and the sensual faded glory, of the humid south. He sent articles back to the *Cincinnati Commercial* before eventually finding employment with the local *Times-Democrat.* But he still struggled with the idea that he was doing the lesser work of journalism as opposed to what he described as "the sacred work of literature." He persevered, and eventually published *Stray Leaves from Strange Lit-*

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erature (1884) and *Some Chinese Ghosts* (1887), which were rough adaptations from foreign literature, and also translations of Gautier and Flaubert. But where was Hearn's own literary work? His journalism continued to bring him a steady, if somewhat erratic income, but his heart was not in it.

A restless soul, Hearn soon began to grow weary of the city of New Orleans, and he made the decision to explore the hinterlands and islands of the bayou, which lay in the Gulf of Mexico. He particularly enjoyed Grande Isle, which he had first visited in 1883, and he imagined himself reclaiming a languorous island past that reminded him—it was a fantasy, of course—of his Mediterranean origins. Encouraged by his discoveries, Hearn decided that he should further explore the world of the tropics. And so, armed with a commission from *Harper's Monthly*, he set off in June 1887 for the West Indies.

He spent two months there, and submitted a piece to *Harper's* called "A Midsummer Trip to the Tropics." He found himself intrigued by the supernatural and erotic elements of the region, and recorded his attraction to the place, and also his repulsion from it, in quick-fire notes that made up his travelogue style. Although he had to stay indoors much of the time, to protect himself from the heat and the snakes, no sooner had he returned to the United States than he began planning once more to travel south. This time his base was Saint-Pierre on the French island of Martinique, a place that in 1902 would be totally destroyed by the eruption of Mount Pelée.

Hearn's extensive notes were eventually published as *Two Years in the French West Indies*, and his sojourn also gave him time to collect material for a second piece of fiction, *Youma*, which, like *Chita*, purported to tell a fictionalized version of a real event. But Hearn soon tired of the West Indies, too, and in April 1889 he returned to the United States. Less than a year later he persuaded *Harper's* that he should set sail for Japan and submit articles from the mysterious Orient. The most important literary period of Hearn's life was about to begin: finally he would find a world—unlike the underworld of Cincinnati, or the Creole world of New Orleans, or the Creolized world of the West Indies—which he could romanticize, but whose sense of itself was such that it would be difficult for him to patronize either the place or the people.

THE WORK COLLECTED in *American Writings* covers the fifteen-year period from Hearn's writing for the *Cincinnati Commercial* to his fiction and non-fiction about the West Indies on the eve of his departure for Japan. The selected early journalism demonstrates something of Hearn's talent for teasing out other people's stories and then conveying the essence of their lives sympathetically, and in often luminous prose. Yet in "Levee Life," which concerns itself with the "original songs and peculiar dances" of the predominantly Negro stevedores and longshoremen of the Ohio River, we see another tendency of Hearn's: he is all too often content simply to gaze raptly and somewhat anthropologically at the world about him, and there is occasionally a pedestrian superficiality to his observations, as though the writer is himself fed up with his assignment. For example:

> Half of the colored 'longshoremen used at one time to wear only a coat and pants, winter and summer; but now they are a little more careful of themselves, and fearful of being sent to the Work-house to be cleaned up. Consequently, when Officer Brazil finds a very ragged and dirty specimen of levee life on the Row, he has seldom occasion to warn him more than once to buy himself a shirt and a change of garments.

At moments such as this, Hearn's uncharacteristically flat prose seems to betray a weariness with the task at hand, and frustration with the kind of writer he has become.

"Gibbeted," which reports the botched execution of a young murderer, is stamped with the familiar sensationalism of Hearn's Cincinnati pieces, but it feels over-rehearsed. Hearn seems too easily to be pushing the right buttons in an attempt to outrage his readership, in the manner of his earlier piece (not included in this volume) "Violent Cremation." Not long after arriving in New Orleans, however, it is clear that the newly created Lafcadio Hearn is determined to roll up his sleeves and present his readership with a more literary man. His observations remain acute, but his prose achieves a new mellifluousness—one which is forever in danger of becoming purple. He describes an unusual visitation of frost to his new city:

> At moments the December sun intensified the brilliancy of these coruscations of frost-fire: lance-rays of solar flame, shivered into myriad sparkles against the glittering mail of interwoven crystals, tinged all the scintillating work with a fairy-faint reflection of such iridescence as flames upon a humming bird's bosom.

It is apparent that, at least to begin with, New Orleans seized Hearn's imagination. Few writers have ever written with more panache about an American city. Taken collectively, his New Orleans writings, which range from stern editorials attacking political misdeeds to impressionistic sketches depicting the mystery of creolized New Orleans, suggest that this distinctive city has more in common with the West Indies and Europe than the American mainland. Hearn's articles helped to create the myth of voodoo New Orleans, and once he stopped writing for newspapers and began to contribute to more literary publications such as *Harper's Monthly*, one can sense a new ambition in his writing.

CHITA, FROM 1889, Hearn's melodramatic adventure novel of the period, is a work at odds with itself. It is the plot-driven story of the strange female child of a respectable middle-class doctor, who survives a hurricane on Grand Isle and is subsequently raised by a family of simple fishing people. Mixed into this narrative, uncomfortably, are numerous digressions exploring cultural and linguistic practices. Hearn attempts to inflate his flimsy story into literature by adopting a highly stylized voice, and tries also to dazzle his readers with short bursts of rich description which ultimately seem to deviate from the main narrative rather than to drive it. The novel is replete with these poetic but static set pieces:

> Sometimes of autumn evenings there, when the hollow of heaven flames like the interior of a chalice, and waves and clouds are flying in one wild rout of broken gold,—you may see the tawny grasses all covered with something like husks,—wheat-colored husks,—large, flat, and disposed evenly along the lee-side of each swaying stalk, so as to present only their edges to the wind. But, if you approach, those pale husks all break open to display strange splendors of scarlet and seal-brown, with arabesque mottlings in white and black: they change into wondrous living blossoms, which detach themselves before your eyes and rise in air, and flutter away by thousands to settle down farther off, and turn into wheat-colored husks once more . . . a whirling flower-drift of sleepy butterflies!

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For all its weaknesses, *Chita* proved to be something of a commercial success, combining as it did sentimentality, an exotic location, and often startling descriptions of seascapes and storms that remind one of Melville and anticipate Conrad. The money that Hearn received from *Harper's* for the serialization of the novel encouraged him to travel further into the creolized world and head down to the West Indies.

Hearn's West Indian writing suggests a strange fascination with the bodies of Negroes, which often crosses the line into an awkward voyeurism. Although the younger Hearn had clearly identified with the black community of Cincinnati, there is a marked change of tone in his writings on racial matters once he reinvents himself in New Orleans. He suddenly appears to have imbibed the Southern nostalgia for the passing of the institution of slavery, and it is in this frame of mind that he sets sail for the West Indies. His dispatches suggest a continued interest in folklore, music, and dance, but his work does little more than preserve a record of a world past and fading, while his attitude toward the people that he encounters is too often one of undisguised superiority. He recaptures the delicacy of description that he achieved in *Chita*, but he now flaunts some newly acquired racial attitudes: "There is a glorious sunset,—a fervid orange splendor, shading starward into delicate roses and greens. Then black boatmen come astern and quarrel furiously for the privilege of carrying one passenger ashore; and as they scream and gesticulate, half naked, their silhouettes against the sunset seem forms of great black apes."

Hearn is fascinated and repulsed by the "half-breeds" that he encounters, and obsessed with the relationship between the mingling of blood and the aesthetically acceptable (or unacceptable) appearance of various grades of people. Increasingly wedded to the notion of "the dignity of a white skin," Hearn muses on what he sees as a conflict between black and mixed-race peoples, and he speculates as to what might happen should trouble break out: "And the true black element, more numerically powerful, more fertile, more cunning, better adapted to pyrogenic climate and tropical environment, would surely win. All these mixed races, all these beautiful fruit-colored populations, seem doomed to extinction: the future tendency must be to universal blackness, if existing conditions continue—perhaps to universal savagery."

Youma, Hearn's West Indian novel of the period, is less successful than *Chita*. Predictably enough, cultural observations and descriptive flourishes are thrown in to spice up the narrative, but it all feels tired, in the same way that Hearn's sojourn in the West Indies seems to fatigue and eventually disappoint him:

> One must send abroad to obtain even a review, and wait months for its coming. And this mental starvation gnaws at the brain more and more as one feels less inclination and less capacity for effort, and as that single enjoyment, which at first rendered a man indifferent to other pleasures,—the delight of being alone with tropical Nature,—becomes more difficult to indulge. When lethargy has totally mastered habit and purpose, and you must at last confess yourself resigned to view Nature from your chamber, or at best from a carriage window,—then, indeed, the want of all literature proves a positive torture. It is not a consolation to discover that you are an almost solitary sufferer,—from climate as well as from mental hunger.

In the end, what are we to make of these West Indian writings, which make up the vast majority of Hearn's *American Writings*? The appendix, titled "Some Creole Melodies," may point to their real value: they were meticulous records of cultural practices that used to be commonplace but which are now in danger of being forgotten. Anthony Trollope and J. A. Froude, the great nineteenth-century Negrophobic chroniclers of the region, wrote with a dyspeptic sneer on their faces, but it is both surprising and disappointing to find that the same is true of Hearn. His may have been a more romantic vision, and he certainly captured the sunrises and sunsets of the region with more literary panache than his English contemporaries; but like Trollope and Froude he looked down on the region and its "childish" people. Instead of seeing a rich past seeping through and contributing to a delightful tropical present, he saw only chaos, disorder, and a place of intellectual torpor. The West Indies disappointed him as the United States had disappointed him; and he would need to journey again.

The almost one thousand pages of *American Writings*, including a short selection of Hearn's letters, end abruptly with the author's departure for Japan, which is where his reputation was eventually made. Unlike the West Indies, Japan did not bore Hearn with a lack of intellectual vitality, and it remained exotic enough to beguile him with the sensuality that he craved. Finally, Japan stimulated his senses and his mind; and it enabled him to focus on a single patch of earth rather than skipping in a seemingly erratic and disorderly fashion from one place to another. Between his arrival in 1890 and his death in 1904, Hearn produced more than a dozen books about the country and its people, and found himself positioned as the man who was introducing the culture of Japan to the West.

This last "rebirth" suited Hearn, who had been more or less discarded at the beginning of his life, and thereafter remained suspicious of co-option into any group or category out of a fear of further rejection. As a child growing up in Ireland and England, he was always dark-skinned "Paddy," and knew that he did not fit in. Although he tried to begin anew in the United States, his career never really took off. But things would be different in Japan. He had barely set foot in the country when he wrote to his friend Elizabeth Bisland, who would eventually become his first biographer, that "I only wish I could be reincarnated in some little Japanese baby, so that I could see and feel the world as beautifully as a Japanese brain does."

American Writings concerns itself with the work that was produced as a result of Hearn's migration to the United States in 1869. Perhaps no other writer of the American world of the late nineteenth century demonstrated such a fascination with a wide range of eclectic material as Hearn, and his tastes and his interests are reflected in the idiosyncrasies of the people and the places about which he chose to write. Still, for all his protestation of detachment, and his cultivation of an identity as a misfit, from the beginning one senses in Hearn a desire to belong—a desire that is always, and quickly, usurped by a growing unease, leading to a precipitous departure. Hearn possessed an understandable yearning to be rooted, and to that end was even moved to commit a socially suicidal marriage. But somehow the American world did not suit his temperament. All his life he had been made to feel offbeat and strange; and when it became clear to him that, despite his reinvention of himself as Lafcadio the literary man, he would never truly be comfortable in the United States, he headed south and further embraced the worlds of voodoo, myth, legend, rituals, and the oral tradition and song.

Predictably, he felt safest in the American world of the past, and this is reflected in his choice of cities—Cincinnati and New Orleans. In 1869, the western

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frontier had already moved far beyond Cincinnati; and the end of the Civil War, and the decline of a slave-based economy, had signaled a major slump in the fortunes of New Orleans. But the nostalgia that permeated both cities seemed to suit Hearn's spirit: he was a man who liked to look over his shoulder and report on how the past had contributed to the present, as opposed to looking up the road and figuring out how the present might contribute to the future. He chose not to write about Chicago or New York, the great capitals of modernity, or to head west to the new frontier lands, or to press on to California. In unfashionable Cincinnati and New Orleans, he was able to make good use of his talent for noticing and transcribing minutiae that spoke to an authenticity more primary and more mysterious than present-day modern American society.

So just what kind of a writer was the thirty-nine-year-old Lafcadio Hearn who, on Saint Patrick's Day 1890, set foot on board a ship bound for Japan? He was a writer who moved from one oddball subject or location to the next, and whose sense of prose was lyrical, and occasionally beautiful; but aside from his body of journalism on New Orleans, he had not yet produced anything truly original. Since his death, it is Hearn's reputation in Japan, as a dedicated interpreter of that country to the West, which has kept his name before the public. And his *American Writings*—do they offer us anything beyond a sepia-tinted window through which we can take a peek at various peculiar corners of American and West Indian life in the late nineteenth century? *Some Chinese Ghosts* is a fairly uninspired retelling of stories already in the public domain. *Chita* lacks any coherent characterization, and the bizarre location and occasional poetic flourishes cannot compensate for the lack of real drama. *Two Years in the West Indies* and *Youma* tread increasingly slump-shouldered across ground that had already been clumsily covered by writers with less literary talent than Hearn; but whatever fascination Hearn might have initially felt for the region was soon replaced by a lethargy that dulled not only his mind but also his pen. So the *American Writings* suggest a writer with a profound literary gift that flickered only from time to time, and a man who eventually allowed his cosmopolitan bent to become corrupted by the vulgar battle between the supposedly superior and the supposedly inferior, and who, in the West Indies, compromised his literary gift so that that he might play the lesser role of judgmental cultural interpreter.

It is the journalistic pieces that are the most impressive legacy of Hearn's American period, allowing us to glimpse the post–Civil War country coming to terms with crime and punishment and entertainment. But Hearn was no Whitman or Twain; he had no desire to use his pen and his imagination to help usher the United States forward and encourage the nation to think of itself in a new and self-confident way. He was attracted to the exotic elements of American life, but he rejected American life in its broadest sense. In the end, he did not want to belong to a place that appeared not to recognize him. He peered down the alleys, he stole in through the back doors, and then he scrambled out again. For something more and better, we will have to await his *Japanese Writings*. ◆

J. Peter Scoblic
MISSILE MAN

A FIERY PEACE IN A COLD WAR: BERNARD SCHRIEVER AND THE ULTIMATE WEAPON
By Neil Sheehan
(Random House, 534 pp., $35)

In late March 1953, a colonel named Bernard Schriever sat in a briefing room at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama, listening as John von Neumann, the brilliant mathematician, and Edward Teller, the physicist, discussed the future of the hydrogen bomb, the far more powerful follow-on to the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki eight years earlier. The United States had detonated its first hydrogen device the previous year in the Pacific, vaporizing a tiny atoll with a force of greater than ten megatons, or ten million tons of TNT. (In contrast, the weapon that destroyed Hiroshima yielded a mere twelve kilotons, or twelve thousand tons of TNT.) Whereas the A-bombs used against Japan had relied on the process known as fission, splitting atoms of uranium and plutonium, the new H-bomb used the power of a fission explosion to fuse isotopes of hydrogen, releasing even more energy in weapons of theoretically unlimited yield. The only problem, from the Air Force's point of view, was that the first fusion device was an impractical behemoth. It weighed eighty-two tons—hardly something one could load into the bay of a bomber.

This problem of "weaponizing" the H-bomb afflicted another deadly gadget as well: the missile. Hitler had made much use of V-2 rockets during World War II, but they had been expensive and militarily ineffective. Still, as the Cold War heated up, both the United States and the Soviet Union were conducting research—aided in no small part by documents and scientists extracted from occupied Germany—into making the missile a more useful weapon of war. But building a missile that could fly across the Atlantic and land anywhere near its target was a considerable challenge. Although accuracy mattered significantly less with atomic (as opposed to conventional) explosives, the warheads were still very heavy and difficult to lift into space. Few people—especially not General Curtis LeMay, the highly decorated bomber commander who was in charge of Strategic Air Command (SAC)—put much stock in such a contraption when an airplane could do the job more cheaply, more accurately, and with greater reliability.

In their presentation, however, von Neumann and Teller said quite confidently that scientists would soon be able to shrink the hydrogen bomb until it weighed just a single ton, while still yielding a megaton of explosive force. As Neil Sheehan recounts in his new book, Schriever immediately understood that, in predicting the imminent miniaturization of the hydrogen bomb, Teller and von Neumann were saying that it would soon be possible, in theory, to build an effective nuclear-armed missile. The blast of a one-megaton weapon would obliterate nearly everything within sixty square miles, to say nothing of the subsequent damage done by fire and radiation, meaning that a thermonuclear warhead could miss its target by a couple miles and still be obscenely effective. There would be nothing surgical about the strike, but the target would be destroyed. A revolution in warfare was in the offing.

In the history of the arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union, the genesis story told most often has been that of the nuclear bomb itself. With its cutting-edge physics, awe-inspiring pyrotechnics, and vivid

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consequences, known to all through the excruciating photos and stories that came out of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the bomb's development has held much of the drama. Rocket science, by comparison, seems almost pedestrian. What is often forgotten is that, while the nuclear bomb may have changed the nature of warfare, it was the nuclear missile that lent the arms race much of its apocalyptic tension. Airplanes carrying nuclear bombs took hours to reach their targets; they could turn around if their commanders, or even their pilots, changed their minds; and they could be defended against with fighters and surface-to-air missiles. They were, in other words, understandable in their scale. Missiles, by contrast, were launched with the turn of a key, they were no more recallable than a bullet fired from a gun, and there was no defense against them. A Soviet intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) would take a mere thirty minutes to reach its target in the United States. Given the early limitations of radar and the time it took to convey news of an attack, an American president would have only a few minutes to decide whether to retaliate before he was himself killed. For nearly thirty years, the fate of humanity rested on such inhumanly compressed time scales. The potential for disaster was enormous.

The missile was to blame for this anxiety. Yet for the nuclear balance to be maintained—for peace to have the highest chance of success—both sides had to have similar capabilities. If nuclear missiles could be built, then both the United States and the Soviet Union needed to build them. Perhaps more than any single individual, Bernard Schriever ensured that the United States not only kept up but excelled in this contest. A protégé of the legendary Hap Arnold, the five-star general who in the waning days of World War II saw how integral technology would be to the postwar military, Schriever built the bridge to a new Air Force that was as exercised by research and development as by flying and fighting. He also helped to spur a change in thinking about the nature of strategic warfare—away from the primacy of manned bombers and from men like LeMay, who fought Schriever and his missile program—and so helped usher in the modern nuclear age.

Sheehan has written an exhaustively researched and reported book that details the tremendous scientific, managerial, and bureaucratic skill that it took to produce the first American missiles. Unfortunately, he has done so in the service of a thesis that makes little sense. For Sheehan, Schriever was not simply a talented man who saw the future of warfare. Schriever's efforts to build the ICBM, he claims, were "for the highest stakes—preventing the Soviet Union from acquiring an overwhelming nuclear superiority that could tempt Soviet leaders into international blackmail and adventurism with calamitous results for human civilization." By beating the Soviets—by "winning the race"—to the ICBM, Schriever helped to stave off the catastrophe that would have ensued if the Russians had gotten there first. That is Sheehan's argument. But it is untenable on theoretical and historical grounds, and Sheehan himself provides the evidence that undermines it. The result is a confused book that obscures rather than illuminates the nature of the arms race.

Born in Bremen in 1910, Bernard Adolph Schriever passed through Ellis Island with his family in 1917, just before the United States declared war on Germany. A reserved child who spent much of his adolescence playing golf—and getting very good at it—he ultimately matriculated at Texas A&M, where he majored in construction engineering. Unable to get a suitable job in Depression-era Texas after graduating, he joined what was then known as the Army Air Corps. He earned his commission in 1933 and was assigned to a squadron at March Field in California, where Arnold was the commanding officer. He initially served as a pilot, but during World War II, which he spent in the Pacific, it was his engineering and managerial skill that got him noticed, and he spent much of the war keeping American bombers in the air.

After Japan surrendered and the American military establishment began to consider how best to defend the United States in the postwar world, a split opened in the Air Force between warriors such as LeMay, who simply believed in bringing as much brute force to bear on the enemy as possible, and visionaries such as Arnold, who believed that a smarter touch would be essential. Arnold tapped Schriever to work with civilian scientists considering the future of air power, and a few years later he was named assistant for development planning, essentially putting him in charge of figuring out what weapons the Air Force would need to fight the Cold War.

It was in this capacity that Schriever heard Teller and von Neumann speak. Determined that the United States needed to build an ICBM as quickly as possible, but aware that he was too low in the hierarchy of power to initiate such a massive undertaking on his own, he sought out allies at the Pentagon. He found one in Trevor Gardner, the special assistant to the secretary of the Air Force for research and development, and together they advocated a crash missile program, which Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson eventually approved. In 1954, Schriever decamped to California, where he and his engineers set up shop in an abandoned schoolhouse. Despite the evident importance of the endeavor, however, Schriever and his team were regularly beset by the bureaucracy. Ultimately, to complete the project, he was forced to appeal directly to Eisenhower, who granted the program top priority, while also ordering Schriever to build an intermediate-range ballistic missile, or IRBM, to counter those the Soviets were building to target Europe.

This mandate put Schriever in competition not only with the Soviet military, but with the U.S. Army, which was already pursuing its own IRBM, aided by Wernher von Braun, who had led development of the V-2, on which all rocket work was based. This inter-service rivalry—it later grew to include the Navy, which at the time was developing Polaris, a submarine-launched ballistic missile, or SLBM—needlessly duplicated weapons and fueled the arms race, but even the parsimonious Eisenhower was unable to eliminate the redundancy. As a result, in the 1950s the United States built two intermediate-range missiles that looked nearly alike. Starting in 1958, the "Thor" IRBMs developed by Schriever's team were deployed to Britain, and the "Jupiters" developed by von Braun were sent to Italy and Turkey.

At the same time, Schriever, convinced that delay meant disaster, hastily pushed ahead with two different ICBMs—"Atlas" and a backup known as "Titan." Within three years his team grew from fifteen people to nearly seven hundred, supported by another two thousand at the Ramo-Wooldridge Corporation, a private contractor providing technical know-how that would eventually grow into the aerospace giant TRW. Testing proceeded fitfully. The first Atlas test was conducted in June 1957, but the missile spun wildly out of control twenty-four seconds after launch. The second, three months later, failed as well. As Schriever's team grew frustrated, the pressure to succeed grew dramatically. That August the Soviets tested their first ICBM, and in October they launched Sputnik, triggering fears of a "missile gap."

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In truth, the Americans were making great strides and would soon overtake their Soviet counterparts. By 1959, Atlas launches were not yet reliable, but Schriever went ahead with deployment anyway, scattering 132 of the Atlas missiles across six bases in the United States. The first Titans were deployed, with similar reservations, in April 1962. As Sheehan writes, "How many of these Titan and Atlas missiles would fly if doomsday arrived and the command to launch was given, no one really knew. But Nikita Khrushchev and the other leaders of the Soviet Union could not afford to bet on percentages of reliability. All they could do was to count missiles.... As Schriever was to say years later to a reunion of those who had participated in the race against the Soviets: 'We beat them to the draw.'"

That Schriever and his compatriots saw themselves in a race against the Soviets for the ICBM is completely understandable, given the fears of the day. Shaped and scarred by World War II, American policymakers feared a "nuclear Pearl Harbor" that, unlike the Japanese attack, would leave the United States in radioactive ruins, incapable of responding. This fear was compounded when the strategist and defense analyst Albert Wohlstetter (whose wife Roberta had written a definitive study of the strategic implications of Pearl Harbor) showed that SAC's air bases could be decimated in a surprise attack. After all, when bombers were not in the air, they were on the ground, vulnerable to pre-emptive strike. These concerns were soon repeated and reinforced, most notably in the Gaither Commission report presented to Eisenhower in November 1957, which warned of the increasing threat and, when leaked to the public, amplified concerns about a missile gap.

Less understandable, though, is Sheehan's embrace of this analysis of the danger. Over and over again, he argues that speed was of the essence in Schriever's work, lest the Soviets gain a nuclear advantage. This helps to make Schriever seem more heroic, and his opponents more narrow-minded. But we know more now. The need to "win" the arms race is an odd conceit for a book published in 2009, especially one that repeatedly bemoans the fear-mongering that took place during the Cold War. For it soon became clear that there is no such thing as superiority in nuclear warfare. In the case of these hideous weapons, the deterrent capacity was well established, the notion of advantage was chimerical, and the race was never really about security. Except for his interest in drama, I do not see why Sheehan so willingly renounces the benefits of historical hindsight.

The nuclear balance between the United States and the Soviet Union rested, very simply, on the ability of each side to respond to a nuclear strike by inflicting unacceptable damage on the attacker. This is true of the nuclear balance between any two states. Since even a handful of nuclear weapons can inflict unacceptable damage, it takes only a modest nuclear arsenal to give you a deterrent capability. Beyond that, additional nuclear weapons do little, if anything, to increase a nation's safety. As Bernard Brodie wrote in 1946, in his prescient book *The Absolute Weapon*, "superiority in numbers of bombs does not endow its possessor with the kind of military security which formerly resulted from superiority in armies, navies, and air forces."

In reality, the 1,769 bombers that the United States possessed in the late 1950s provided us with a devastating second-strike capability. Given that a single weapon could obliterate a city, one needed only a handful of bombers to deal a devastating counterpunch. Ensuring that enough bombers would survive a Soviet attack was a relatively straightforward task: in the wake of the Gaither report, Eisenhower shrewdly ordered that one-third of the force be kept on fifteen-minute strip alert, and by 1961 some bombers were in the air twenty-four hours a day. Besides which, generals like LeMay had no intention of waiting to be hit before striking the Soviet Union. If it looked like war, he favored striking first. Indeed, the doctrine of "massive retaliation" called for being the first to use nuclear weapons if the Soviets launched even a modest conventional attack in Europe. All of which is to say that, whatever the fears of the 1950s, it is clear in retrospect that the stakes of the race to build an ICBM were much lower than Sheehan suggests. The United States had a secure retaliatory capability well before the first Atlas and Titan missiles were deployed.

That said, the perception—that fateful term in the history of these weapons—of Soviet nuclear advantage could indeed have been a problem, and Sheehan argues, not implausibly, that if the Soviets had gotten an ICBM first, their feeling of superiority would have encouraged aggression, perhaps even provoking "nuclear adventures." The problem is that the Soviets did embark on a nuclear adventure, and they did so *after* the United States beat them to the ICBM. In fact, they embarked on a nuclear adventure precisely because the United States beat them to the ICBM. It was the feeling of nuclear inferiority triggered by the deployment of the missiles developed by Schriever that led Khrushchev to place nuclear missiles in Cuba, setting off the most dangerous crisis of all. And what is utterly incomprehensible about *A Fiery Peace* is that Sheehan himself makes this point with conviction and no small amount of evidence.

By the second year of the Kennedy administration, thanks largely to Schriever's efforts, the United States had attained what Sheehan calls an "awesome nuclear superiority." The Soviets had made strides in their missile program, but were hampered by their late development of

Mr. Darcy

He comes through the uneven grass. In a blue cape coat. Boots. Long hair. A white shirt with sleeves that cover his palms. The terminal part of his body. But there is nothing terminal here, even silence is not silent. I sit at Terminal E, gate 37 and wait for a plane that never arrives. They circle the runways but never take off. The people in the airport don't speak. They only gasp. They gasp her gasp. When she sees the man. In the fog, in the grass, in the threads of orange trees. I want to be her, the girl who wrestles a man's heart into a balcony. I want to wrestle the same man's heart over and over. But what if there are at least nine hearts? What if I only have one balcony? Is this why her gasp inhabits my throat? It is stuck in there. I want the gasp to come out in the form of something other than a man, something other than his teeth marks. I want to throw up the gasp so I can finally be free of its ring and creep. I want it to leave me alone. I want it to leave me. I want it.

VICTORIA CHANG

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the hydrogen bomb. Instead of launching small but powerful warheads, they were trying to launch heavy ones, necessitating enormous rockets. Meanwhile, as Atlas and Titan were being deployed, one of Schriever's underlings made another breakthrough, developing a missile that used solid, rather than liquid, fuel and therefore could be kept ready to launch at any moment. It was a huge advance in reliability and speed, enabling the United States to launch an attack much more quickly; and in 1962 the United States began to deploy the aptly named "Minuteman."

In February of that year, Khrushchev met with his senior defense advisers and was informed just how far ahead the Americans were. Sheehan breaks down the tally at the time of the crisis:

> By the end of the forthcoming October . . . Khrushchev would possess a mere twenty unreliable ICBMs, along with a bomber force of fifty-eight Bison jets, limited to a one-way trip, and seventy-six Tu-95 turboprops, slow planes that were dead pigeons to the American jet interceptors and surface-to-air missiles. In contrast, Kennedy would flaunt ninety-six Atlas ICBMs, fifty-four Titans, ten Minutemen, forty-eight of the Navy's new Polaris submarine-launched IRBMs hidden on station in the depths, and SAC's bomber force of 1,741 B-47s, B-58s, and B-52s. Uncounted because of their joint control but also ready were the sixty Thor IRBMs in England, the thirty Jupiters in Italy, and the sixteen in Turkey.

By 1962, in other words, we had not simply won the race, it had been a total blowout.

And just as the prospect of overwhelming Soviet advantage panicked Americans during the "missile gap," spurring greater military spending and giving Kennedy an edge in the election of 1960, so it panicked the Soviets—into making possibly the most treacherous decision ever made. As Sheehan writes, "Khrushchev saw a way around this dilemma. The Soviet Union possessed plenty of well-tested IRBMs. If a substantial number of these were slipped into Cuba, their presence 90 miles from Key West would, as he put it in his memoirs, equalize 'what the West likes to call "the balance of power."'" So that is exactly what Khrushchev did: he packed several dozen intermediate- and medium-range ballistic missiles onto freighters and shipped them to Cuba. Rather than deterring Soviet nuclear adventurism, the enormous success of the American ICBM program actually encouraged it.

It is difficult to overstate just how close the ensuing crisis brought us to apocalypse—and therefore just what a flaw it exposes in Sheehan's belief that ICBM superiority made us safer. The reaction of the Joint Chiefs to the discovery of missiles in Cuba was to urge an air strike. An attack would likely have backfired horribly. Although Kennedy and his advisers were not sure of this at the time, the warheads for the missiles were already on the island, able to destroy numerous American cities. They were joined by some ninety tactical nuclear weapons designed for battlefield use. As Sheehan notes, the FKR cruise missiles, each with a range of one hundred miles and a blast of up to twelve kilotons, could have been used to take out an invading American fleet. Any of the dozen Luna missiles, which could travel thirty-one miles and explode with a force of two kilotons, could have taken out an American beachhead. Worse, for a time Khrushchev had delegated authority to his commanding general in Cuba, Issa Pliyev, to use the tactical nuclear weapons as he saw fit—and Soviet colleagues later said that he would have used them in self-defense. Castro had urged Khrushchev to use the ballistic missiles if the Americans attacked.

It was American nuclear superiority, in other words, that helped get us into the mess, and, once we were in it, nuclear superiority did not help get us out of it. Sheehan might have argued that American superiority gave Kennedy the confidence to face down Khrushchev and force the missiles' removal from Cuba—but he doesn't do so, and wisely, given that there is little evidence to support the proposition. Kennedy understood that an attack very well could have precipitated a nuclear war, which would have been devastating for the United States irrespective of our massive advantage. Ironically, it was the removal of the Jupiter missiles from Turkey, symbolically ratcheting back our nuclear superiority and providing a diplomatic tit for tat, that helped bring the crisis to a peaceful end. Sheehan recounts much of this himself, and yet less than ten pages after doing so he writes, without a trace of self-awareness, that "by starting in the mid-1950s, before it was too late, and then winning the race for a practical ICBM, they had warded off the possibility of blackmail . . . and also discouraged nuclear adventures by the Soviets." At this point it is simply impossible to take the book seriously, except perhaps as a good story.

What the ICBM did was more modest: it allayed our own post-Sputnik fears about nuclear inferiority, while helping to convince the Soviets that we would always be able to retaliate in response to an attack, because it gave us an additional way to do so. Yes, we already had a second-strike capability provided by our bombers, but the ICBM strengthened deterrence on both sides by bringing perceptions closer into line with reality. In this sense, ICBMs did serve a useful purpose; but Sheehan exaggerates their contribution when he argues that they were an unalloyed good, and that Schriever's contribution was world-changing, taking us past the frightening possibility of nuclear war to the certain safety of nuclear stalemate.

That is a gross oversimplification. If ICBMs were in some ways stabilizing, they were in other ways destabilizing; and if at times they deepened the nuclear peace, at other times they made nuclear war more likely. Ultimately, the stalemate between the superpowers was best guaranteed by rough nuclear parity, which is what every arms control agreement, from SALT I to the "New START" being negotiated by the Obama administration, has tried to establish. But Sheehan misses that point, he contradicts himself, when he extols how much his hero did to "foster a nuclear stalemate" while simultaneously noting that "the creation of Minuteman now put the United States so far ahead in the strategic missile competition that the Soviet Union was confronted not with a gap but with a chasm." Chasms do not make stalemates. They are, in fact, temptations to dangerous ideas about use. Soviet feelings of inferiority were dangerous, leading not only to episodes such as the Cuban missile crisis, but also to Soviet nuclear build-ups, which in turn prompted American build-ups, and so on.

That is why it is absurd for Sheehan to claim, in another overstatement, that "Minuteman put an end to the fear of a nuclear Pearl Harbor." That fear never ended. If it had, we would never have built another nuclear weapon. But after taking office—and after learning that the missile gap was a fiction—Kennedy (and then Johnson) added to the arsenal more than 1,500 new ICBMs and SLBMs, carrying nearly 2,500 warheads, plus another five hundred warheads deliverable by bomber. And it was not just the numbers of weapons that mattered; it was also the types of weapons. Nixon may have negotiated the first agreements limiting nuclear arms, but he also proceeded with the development of multiple inde-

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pendently targetable re-entry vehicles, or MIRVs, which gave each Minuteman three warheads and therefore tripled their lethality. Carter not only moved to deploy more intermediate-range missiles in Europe, he also approved development of the mobile MX missile—effectively accepting the view of American hawks that the United States, with its stationary Minutemen, was entering a "window of vulnerability," in which it would be susceptible to a Soviet first strike. And Reagan authorized the deployment of an additional three thousand nuclear-armed air-launched cruise missiles and accelerated development of a new SLBM, new nuclear-capable sea-launched cruise missiles, and the B-2 stealth bomber, which could evade Soviet air defenses to deliver a nuclear payload.

We did all these things because we were constantly, inconsolably afraid of the effects of a Soviet numerical advantage in nuclear weapons, and even of the possibility of a "bolt from the blue." Once again, Sheehan himself acknowledges this, writing (in one of the book's more infelicitous sentences) that "technology was in the saddle of a horse named Fear in a race of human folly." That may be true, but it completely undercuts his own insistence that the ICBM brought some sort of serenity to American security policy.

The ICBM was many things. At their most stabilizing, the rockets that Schriever built provided both transparency and predictability—not through their ability to send warheads hurtling toward the Soviet Union, but through their ability to loft spy satellites into orbit, giving us a better sense of what weapons the Soviets had, a way to verify arms control agreements, and a look at preparations that could instigate, accelerate, or defuse a crisis. At the same time, ICBMs could provoke strategic instability: as critics of the Minuteman noted, it was even more stationary than a bomber on an airfield, making it an easy target and therefore important to get off the ground quickly during a crisis. This was particularly true of MIRVed missiles, whose lethality made them extremely attractive targets and whose accuracy made them useful for taking out enemy missile silos. They were, in other words, excellent warfighting weapons—which is to say, they enhanced fear rather than abated it. And because solid-fueled missiles were fast enough to launch on warning of an attack, before enemy missiles had actually struck the United States, they were far easier to launch in error than other types of nuclear weapons.

After bombers, ICBMs became the second leg of the nuclear "triad"—the three delivery vehicles that, between them, were supposed to guarantee the ability to retaliate. But if Sheehan had really been interested in the establishment of the nuclear balance, he might have looked at the creators of the third leg: the submarine-launched ballistic missile. Since submarines could lurk undetected, they were largely immune to the first-strike fears that plagued bomber bases and ICBM fields. Polaris, the first such American missile, was developed by the Navy at the same time that Schriever was building the ICBM for the Air Force, but Sheehan barely mentions it.

Perhaps the officers of the Polaris program simply were not as interesting. But Schriever, who died in 2005, was indeed a consequential figure. He did not simply build the ICBM. He changed the Air Force and spurred the creation of the American aerospace industry. His rockets did far more than carry warheads: by putting satellites into orbit, they enabled not only espionage, but also the communications revolution; and later they carried astronauts into space. But in the notes at the end of the book, Sheehan writes that in telling Schriever's story, he hopes to "distill the immensity of the Cold War and the Soviet-American arms race into a human narrative that a reader could identify with and comprehend." In this he has failed. His book does not accurately capture the immensity of the Cold War and the Soviet-American arms race. It is not even clear that Sheehan has fully captured the humanity of his subject.

We learn far less about Schriever the man—as opposed to Schriever the manager—than one would expect from a work of this ambition. The book is astonishingly detailed, but often meaninglessly so. Sheehan makes space for sentences such as this: "Their blue Air Force staff car had pulled up to the guard cubicle just inside the northwest gate to the White House off Pennsylvania Avenue at precisely 7:30 a.m." Yet there is little more than one single-page chapter about Schriever's relationship with his three children and their mother, who left him in 1968. It is not until the book's epilogue, in which Sheehan quickly skims the last forty years of Schriever's life, that we learn that the general was "an old-fashioned sexist … [who] did not appear to regard any woman as an equal." That is not surprising for a man who was born in 1910 and spent his career in the mid-century military, but I finished the book wondering if Schriever was really more complex, and more flawed, and therefore more interesting, than I had been led to believe, which is not a question one should ask at the end of a vast biography.

For a book purporting to encapsulate the Cold War, we also learn little of its hero's foreign policy views. Sheehan spends an entire section taking us through the onset of the Cold War, the misunderstandings that occurred, and the unfortunate Manichaeism that gripped much of the American foreign policy establishment. But how Schriever felt about the Soviet Union and our responses to it, we are never told; and we get almost nothing on his beliefs about the utility of nuclear weapons. Contra LeMay, he clearly saw them as a deterrent that was never meant to be used. But there is quite a range of thought to the left of LeMayism, and where Schriever stands on the most important questions that were raised by his most significant accomplishment is unclear. Did he believe that nuclear superiority mattered? Did he believe the ICBM had closed the window of vulnerability? What did he think about arms control efforts that were designed precisely to enhance the deterrent capability he lauded, but which tended to confound military officers who were interested in fighting a nuclear war most effectively should the missiles start flying? The real developments in nuclear stability during the Cold War came less from the development of specific weapons than from how we conceived of their utility—from "massive retaliation" to "counterforce" to "mutual assured destruction." The decisive factors were intellectual, not mechanical.

Bernard Schriever was not a thinker but an engineer, as were the men around him. (We meet an interminable number of such people in countless digressions.) As Sheehan writes, "Yet anxiety for the security of their nation and a race against opponents who would endanger it were only half of what drove them. These men were engineers. They built things. Theirs was a different ethos from that of operators like Power and LeMay, who got their adrenaline rush from the lure of aerial combat. The engineers' fulfillment came from creating the new, from bringing into being that which no one else had yet achieved." All that is admirable, and in the right hands it is even exciting. But without an explanation of why the talent mattered, we are left with an obsessive and melodramatic tale of gadgets and gadgeteers. Finally Sheehan's epic is empty. It is like *Apollo 13* without the moon. ◆

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Washington Diarist

Unmending Wall

The absence of Barack Obama from Berlin on the anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall may be explained in many ways, and one of the explanations may be his view of the world. He is *kein Berliner*. No, he is not soft on communism, not least because there is no longer any communism, at least of the classical kind, to be soft on. In the video message that was broadcast to the commemoration—it allowed him once again to have the stage to himself, and to describe his own election as a climactic event in "human destiny"—Obama spoke all the right words for all the right sentiments. But his portrait of the Atlantic alliance was curiously passive, as if it defeated totalitarianism by example, by believing what it believes, and not also by challenging the Soviet Union, and blocking it, and deploying missiles, and supporting dissenters, in ways that many progressives found "destabilizing." Obama declared that "the work of freedom is never finished," which is true enough, but the urgent question is what he means by "work." Consider an example. A few days before the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the wall in Berlin, there occurred the thirtieth anniversary of the seizure of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran. The dictators' commemoration of that happy day in the history of their dictatorship was ruined by rallies of democrats and dissidents. Obama's response was to intone wanly that "the world continues to bear witness to their powerful calls for justice." So does "witness" count as "work"? Was the Soviet Union brought down by "witness"? We did not, on our own, bring the Soviet Union down—it collapsed, pathetically, on itself; but we assisted keenly in its collapse. Are we assisting in the mullahs' collapse? I think not. Our Iran policy seems not to have discovered the connection between Iranian nuclearization and Iranian liberalization. The only sure solution to the former is the latter. It is no longer a fantasy to contemplate a new Iran. For this reason, American support for the democracy movement in Iran (*he sounds like Bush! and he calls himself a liberal!)* is not only a moral duty, it is also a strategic duty. Such support might indeed be "destabilizing," but there is no stability in Iran anymore, there is only a vicious tyranny fighting for its life against a popular uprising that explains itself with principles that we, too, espouse. It makes sense that the man who takes no side in that fight did not make it to Berlin.

There are two ways of regarding the cold war. The first is to view it admiringly as a struggle between philosophies as they were embodied in states, so that the victory of the American idea over the Soviet idea was a victory of good (not innocence) over evil—a time of anxiety and grandeur, in which reason and courage defeated the most murderous political system in history and averted the greatest danger in history. The second is to view it condescendingly as a contest between two states swollen with power imposing their interests on a world that needed instead to be fed and clothed, each with its ideological excuses for its global ambitions, both on the verge of obsolescence of one sort or another—an era made mercifully archaic by globalization and hybridity and interdependence and connectivity, a low and useless era. I expect that Obama would concur with bits of both views. But his absence in Berlin makes me wonder whether a word need not be said for the pertinence of the legacy of anti-communism to the foundations of American foreign policy. Anti-communism, after all, was a doctrine of human rights. When it negotiated about nuclear weapons, it negotiated also about human rights. It was not embarrassed by the moral analysis of governments and movements, and it insisted that such an analysis has strategic implications. It preferred dissidents to regimes, even when it engaged with regimes. How can any of this be immaterial to our quandaries in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, China, Russia, and elsewhere? How can the totalitarians and authoritarians, religious and secular, in those crucial and hazardous regions be understood without a moral vocabulary? To be sure, a moral vocabulary may easily justify abuses; but not as easily as an amoral or an immoral one. Liberals no longer remember that anti-communism was once a glory of liberalism. The president is so busy breaking new ground in foreign policy that he may not see that the ground of his foreign policy is broken. His renunciation of idealism has brought none of the rewards of realism. Conflicts that were supposed to be transformed by his magic are immune to his magic. He has no magic. There is no magic. His trip to China, when the subject of human rights will no doubt be "raised," will show this again. When he gets back, perhaps he will meet with the Dalai Lama, but not for the purpose of "strategic reassurance." That blessing is reserved for Hu Jintao. It makes sense that the man who refused to meet with the Dalai Lama did not make it to Berlin.

If democracy had holy days, November 9 would be one of them. But on the morning of that day I awoke to find that the editors of the op-ed page of *The New York Times*, in their ceaseless quest for mental refreshment, had decided to correct the one-sided favorable press that 1989 has enjoyed for decades and invited a Leninist to explain the meaning of the occasion to their readers, who were hotly instructed by Slavoj Žižek not to fall for the illusion of progress, because capitalism does not provide the "life of sincerity and simplicity" that the rebels of 1989 sought, and that "socialism with a human face," which was what they really desired, "deserves a second chance." I ended the day watching Hillary Clinton, who represented us in Berlin, reflect for Charlie Rose on the "new walls" of our age, not "the visible of the concrete and the barbed wire," but the "walls of ignorance and extremism," of "oppression and impoverishment." She was not wrong, but she was vaporous. Some of the ills that she noted are the result of walls, but some of them are the result of the lack of walls. When she mentioned "the walls that exist in the mindsets" of suicide bombers, I recalled the undeniably hideous but undeniably life-saving wall in Israel. Sometimes the only response to a mental wall is a physical wall. Walls protect. Walls confine and walls define. Walls exclude and walls include. In one of his notebooks, Frost scribbled a little epitome of his great poem about the versatility of such hindrances:

> Something there is that doesn't love a wall
> Something there is that does and after all

Leon Wieseltier

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The country that put a man on the moon can
cure cancer.
We've always embraced big challenges in this country. It's how the world sees us. How we see ourselves.
Now, President Obama has called on us to end cancer in our lifetime. America's pharmaceutical research and biotechnology companies share that goal. Today, our scientists are working on 800 new medicines to fight this deadly disease that touches so many lives.
It won't be easy, and it won't happen without a renewed emphasis on innovation and a sustained commitment to research and development. Last year, we invested more than $65 billion to discover and develop medicines to help patients live longer, healthier and more productive lives. Like President Obama, we believe that America's best days are ahead of us. Working together, we can do anything.
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